

# Hitler's War

The storm breaks  
AJP Taylor/J M Roberts

# HISTORY OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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# History of the 20th Century

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Litovsk* and *The History of Soviet  
Foreign Policy*. He has also written  
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foreign policy.



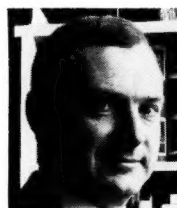
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History of Europe. He has been English  
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**Major-General  
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Walcheren). He was also Chief of  
Amphibious Warfare. He is the author  
of *Haste to Battle, Defence in a  
Changing World*, and *The Norwegian  
Campaign of 1940*.

## Further reading

**The Outbreak of War**  
W. Hofer, *War Premeditated* (Thames &  
Hudson); W.L. Langer and S.E. Gleason,  
*The Challenge to Isolation* (Royal  
Institute of International Affairs).

**The Nazi-Soviet Pact**  
E.H. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations  
Between the Two Wars* (Oxford Univer-  
sity Press); G. Kennan, *Russia and the  
West* (Hutchinson).

**Teschen, Aftermath of Munich**  
Piotr Wandycz, *France and her Eastern  
Allies, 1919-1925: French-Czecho-  
slovak-Polish Relations from the Paris  
Peace Conference to Locarno* (Univer-  
sity of Minnesota Press); A. Cienciala,  
*Poland and the Western Powers,  
1938-1939* (Routledge & Kegan Paul).

**War: Shadow and Reality**  
G. Chapman, *Why France Collapsed*  
(Cassell); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of  
the Second World War* (Hamish  
Hamilton).

**The Balance of Power**  
H. Rosinski (ed. G. Craig), *The German  
Army* (Pall Mall Press); G. Chapman,  
*Why France Collapsed* (Cassell); Sir  
Basil Liddell Hart, *The Liddell Hart  
Memoirs* (Cassell).

## Next week in No 61

**The Fall of France**  
To Germans who had not actually  
witnessed the rout of the French  
armies before the thrusting Panzers  
and howling Stukas, the defeat of  
France was hard to believe. But as

Alistair Horne shows in his article  
*Victory in the West*, Hitler had realized  
that France, with its weak leadership  
and divided political loyalties, was no  
longer a formidable military power.

**Poland 1939**  
Stunned by the speed and shock of the  
German Blitzkrieg, Poland's hopelessly  
antiquated army disintegrated in a  
matter of weeks. Never before was a  
victory won so resoundingly with so  
few losses. Sir Basil Liddell Hart, who  
originated the theory of the Blitzkrieg,  
describes this German victory for us  
in his article *Blitzkrieg on Poland*.

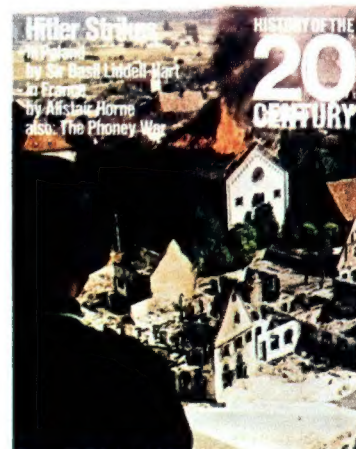
**The Phoney War**  
The Blitzkrieg which destroyed Poland  
was followed by a strange lull—a  
period quite unlike any other in the  
turbulent story of the Second World  
War, as our Editor, Christopher Falkus,  
shows in his article on *The Phoney War*.

**The Invasion of Norway**  
There were moments during the  
German invasion of Norway when  
Hitler was on the point of losing his  
nerve. In his article, *The Invasion of  
Norway*, Major-General J.L. Moulton  
shows how serious reverses might have  
been inflicted on the invader, but the  
campaign—especially that of the  
British—to dislodge the Germans was  
muddled both in concept and  
execution.

**The Winter War**  
In the first month of the war, Finland  
won an amazing victory over Russia.  
In *Finland: Russia Attacks*,  
J.N. Westwood describes how daring  
Finnish infantry destroyed whole  
columns of Russian tanks and single  
companies held off whole divisions.

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## Cover of No 61





# Chapter 60

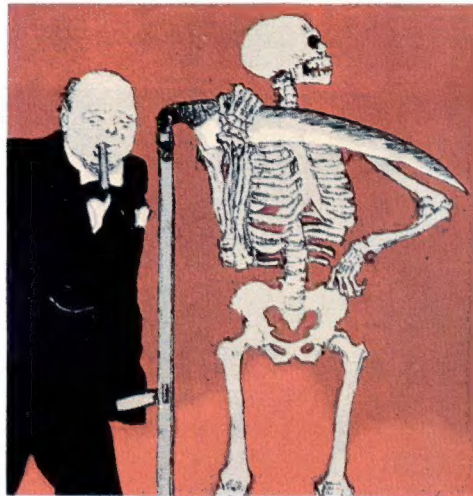
Introduction by J.M.Roberts

Though it had been so often threatened and though it had so long been feared, war, when it finally came to Europe, was still unexpected by many people. Yet it had been inevitable at least since 23rd August, when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed. That agreement released Hitler from fears that he might not have a free hand over Poland: he seems to have thought that Great Britain and France would desert their ally.

Although it brought important short-term benefits, the Nazi-Soviet Pact embarrassed Russian apologists for years to come. It at once caused a storm of controversy on the Left in Great Britain and France. Russian historians are still struggling to get it into a perspective which enables them to justify it. In discussing Russian participation in this *History* I was strongly reproached for presuming to use the term which Western historians refer to the agreement: the Russians prefer The Soviet-German Treaty of 1939, the title of the article by A.O.Chubaryan. As we stipulated to our Russian colleagues, we are presenting a comment on the Russian view by D.C. Watt and the whole feature bears the joint title **The Nazi-Soviet Pact**. It will be seen that the divergence of Western and Soviet views is fundamental. And one aspect of the pact is worth recall. When all is said and done about the necessary self-interest of Soviet conduct at that time, it remains true that one result of this agreement was that the Russians handed over German socialists and Communists to the Gestapo. It is still not easy to see that this was dictated by diplomatic necessity, or that Russian interests were advanced by it.

We precede this discussion with an article by A.J.P.Taylor describing **The Outbreak of War**. There was little likelihood that a general war could be avoided if the Poles stood firm, though Chamberlain, the French, and Hitler all hoped otherwise. In the end British public opinion, sensed and expressed by the House of Commons, proved them wrong, and the upshot was that to Great Britain and France alone among the major powers belongs the honour of declaring war on Nazi Germany rather than helping Hitler or waiting to be attacked first. This was in many ways surprising. People did not look forward to war as they had done in 1914. I have described some of the illusions which shaped their fears in my article on **War: Shadow and Reality**. Finally, we have an article on **Teschen, Aftermath of Munich**, a bitterly debated episode by Anna Cienciala, and a survey by J.L. Moulton of **The Military Balance** describing the strength of the powers in 1939. The lack of use that was made of this strength in the following six months was even more surprising. The powers did virtually nothing and the result was what came to be called 'the phoney war'.

Simplicissimus



German cartoon. Death, to Churchill: 'Go on making trouble; we'll soon be in business'

Institute of Social History, Amsterdam



Jacques Duclos, French Communist leader, thrown into dilemma by Nazi-Soviet Pact

Time-Life



US magazine cover on outbreak of war. British soldier prepares for bombers and gas

## Europe

- 1938 29th September: Munich Conference begins.
- 30th September: Signing of Munich agreement. Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, and Mussolini agree to transfer Sudetenland to Germany.
- 1939 14th March: Prompted by Hitler, Slovak leader, Tiso, proclaims a breakaway 'Slovak Free State'.
- 15th March: German troops march into Prague and take over Bohemia and Moravia. None of the great powers moves to check Germany but Hitler's action disillusioned those who believed his aims to be restricted to German territories.
- 21st March: German government submits stiff demands to Poland concerning Danzig and the Polish Corridor. They are rejected.
- 22nd March: Germans annex Klaipeda (Memel) and Lithuanians are forced to sign treaty.
- 23rd March: Hitler imposes shackling economic agreement upon Rumania.
- 31st March: British and French pledge aid to the Poles in case of action threatening Polish independence.
- 6th April: promise of Anglo-French aid to Poland is expanded into a pact of mutual assistance.
- 7th April: Italy invades Albania.
- Spain joins Anti-Comintern Pact.
- 13th April: Great Britain and France guarantee independence of Greece and Rumania.
- 18th April: USSR proposes defence alliance with Great Britain and France. It is rejected as premature.
- 28th April: Hitler rejects Roosevelt's peace proposals, denounces Anglo-German naval treaty and German-Polish non-aggression pact.
- 3rd May: Molotov replaces Litvinov as commissar of foreign affairs in USSR.
- 12th May: Anglo-Turkish mutual assistance pact.
- 22nd May: Germany signs Pact of Steel, a military alliance with Italy.
- 9th July: Churchill urges military alliance with USSR.
- 12th August: Anglo-French mission to USSR begins talks in Moscow.
- 18th August: Germany makes commercial agreement with USSR.
- 21st August: news reaches Great Britain that Germany and USSR are about to make a pact of non-aggression.
- 22nd August: Ribbentrop arrives in Moscow.
- 23rd August: the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Germany signs non-aggression pact with USSR; secret clauses partition Poland.
- Henderson warns Hitler that Great Britain will fulfil guarantees to Poland.
- Hitler states that Germany's interest in Danzig and the Corridor cannot be waived. Moves forward planned attack on Poland from 1st September to 26th August.
- Lipski, Polish ambassador, refuses to start negotiations with the Germans.
- Daladier, French Premier, summons the Committee of National Defence at request of Bonnet, French foreign minister.
- 24th August: British Parliament applauds what it considers to be government's firm stand.
- Nazi leader is appointed head of Danzig State.
- 25th August: Hitler makes Henderson a 'last offer'. Anglo-Polish mutual assistance pact.
- Mussolini informs Hitler that Italy is not ready for war.
- Hitler postpones attack on Poland until original date, 1st September.
- 28th August: Great Britain urges direct negotiations between Germany and Poland.
- 29th August: Hitler agrees to direct negotiations but Polish representative must arrive within twenty-four hours. Henderson urges acceptance but Poles refuse.
- 31st August: Hitler orders attack on Poland. Evacuation of women and children from London begins.
- Supreme Soviet ratifies German non-aggression pact.
- 1st September: German forces attack Poland. Germany annexes Danzig.
- Great Britain and France demand withdrawal of German troops.
- 2nd September: Luftwaffe gains air superiority over Poland.
- Chamberlain addresses House of Commons. Cabinet decision that an ultimatum be sent to Hitler.
- 3rd September: British ultimatum is delivered. Expires at 11 a.m.
- French declare war at 5 p.m.







# The Outbreak of War

*On 1st September 1939 Poland, the ally of Great Britain and France, was attacked by German forces. Hitler wanted Danzig and the Polish Corridor. The British government was almost prepared to let him have his way. . . .*

The war crisis of 1939 began on 21st August, with the announcement that Ribbentrop, German foreign minister, had been invited to Moscow by the Soviet government. Though the Nazi-Soviet Pact was not formally concluded until 23rd August, it was obvious that Ribbentrop would not go to Moscow unless agreement had already been reached in principle. Hence it was certain that the negotiations for an alliance between France, Great Britain, and Soviet Russia had broken down. This is what Hitler wished to establish. Soviet neutrality in itself was not enough for him. What he needed was public news of this neutrality so that he could shake the nerves of the British and French governments. Stalin, the Soviet dictator, exacted his price in return. Though he, too, like Hitler, probably expected British and French resolution to collapse, he wanted to keep the Germans far from the Soviet frontier if war occurred after all. Hence the Nazi-Soviet Pact drew a barrier in Eastern Europe which the Germans were not to cross.

The pact was neither an alliance nor a partition agreement. The Soviet government merely promised to stay neutral which is what the Poles had always asked them to do, and in addition they set a limit to German expansion. However, the immediate effect was certainly discouraging for the Western powers. Until the last moment they had gone on dreaming either that Hitler would be frightened by the Soviet bogeyman or that Soviet Russia would do their fighting for them. Now they had to decide for themselves, and Hitler was convinced that they would run away. On 22nd August he delivered to his generals a wild oration: 'Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally.' He boasted: 'I have got Poland where I wanted her,' and added cheerfully: 'The probability is great that the West will not intervene.' Hitler was play-acting in order to impress the German generals. He guessed that some of them would leak to the British, and sure enough some did. Almost at once the British embassy received an exaggerated version of Hitler's speech and was correspondingly alarmed.

On 23rd August Hitler went a step fur-

ther. He moved forward the attack on Poland, fixed for 1st September, to 4.40 a.m. on 26th August. This, too, was play-acting. The German preparations could not be complete before 1st September. Attack on Poland before then was possible only if she had already surrendered. Thus Hitler counted confidently on the collapse of the Western powers.

The French almost came up to his expectations. Georges Bonnet, the foreign minister, had always wanted to desert the Poles. He accepted the German case over Danzig. He had no faith in the Polish army. On 23rd August Daladier, the Premier, summoned the Committee of National Defence at Bonnet's request. Bonnet asked: should they push Poland into a compromise and postpone the war until they were stronger? Gamelin, the French commander-in-chief, would not admit the weakness of his army. He asserted that the Poles could hold out until the spring. By then, France would be 'impregnable'. There was no suggestion that France could aid Poland in any way. Nor did the French attempt to discuss the situation with the British. There were no Anglo-French meetings of ministers such as had marked the Czech crisis. Ideally, the French would have liked the British to force surrender on them. But they would not take the lead in abdication themselves. There was a choice between abandoning Poland and fighting a great war in which France would carry most of the burden. The French refused to choose. They sat helplessly by throughout the week when others decided the fate of Europe and of France.

## *British obstinacy*

The British government were apparently more resolute. On 22nd August they issued a statement that the coming Nazi-Soviet Pact 'would in no way affect their obligation to Poland'. There was nothing else to do. The British ministers were proud and obstinate. They were not going to have the Opposition crowing that their policy was in ruins. Besides, they feared to be swept away in a storm of public opinion if they showed weakness. Conservative backbenchers had disliked the negotiations with Soviet Russia. But many of them had fought in the First World War. They could not imagine that Great Britain was unable to impose her will on Germany if she determined to do so. As for the Opposition, they had championed the Soviet alliance. Now they were resolved to show that, unlike Stalin, they stuck to their principles.

In secret, the British ministers wanted to

*Far left: In a German cartoon of 10th September 1939—a week after outbreak of war—Chamberlain and Daladier, almost swamped by events, ponder what went wrong with their plans for peace and hope things will not get any more out of control. Left: 3rd September. British newsvendor in London's Strand*

Central Press





give way. Chamberlain told Kennedy, the American ambassador: 'The futility of it all is frightful; we cannot save the Poles; we can only carry on a war of revenge that will mean the destruction of all Europe.' Chamberlain said he could not put pressure on Poland himself. Would President Roosevelt do it for him? Roosevelt refused. The only hope was to warn Hitler, or rather to plead with him. On 23rd August Nevile Henderson flew to Berchtesgaden. He delivered a warning that Great Britain would stand by Poland. But he also asserted that Hitler could get Danzig peacefully, and he spread out the delights of an Anglo-German alliance. Hitler appeared to be unimpressed. He stormed and ranted. When Henderson left, Hitler slapped his thigh and exclaimed: 'Chamberlain will not survive that conversation. His government will fall tonight.' Back in Berlin, Henderson told Lipski, the Polish ambassador, that the only chance was for Poland to start negotiations immediately. Lipski took no notice.

On 24th August the British Parliament met. It unanimously applauded what it supposed to be the government's firm stand. Hitler began to doubt whether the British government had yet reached the point of surrender. He flew to Berlin and held a conference with Ribbentrop and his leading generals. He asked: should they stick to 26th August as the date for the attack on Poland? He decided that he would make a further attempt to detach the Western powers from their alliance with Poland. This took the form of a 'last offer' which Hitler made to Henderson soon after midday on 25th August. He declared that the problems of Danzig and the Corridor must be 'solved'—though he did not say how. Once this was done, he would guarantee the British Empire, accept an agreed limitation of armaments, and renew his assurance that Germany's western frontier was fixed for ever. Henderson was impressed as usual and thought that Hitler spoke 'with apparent sincerity'. Henderson promised to take Hitler's offer to London the next morning. Hitler approved. What was he up to? By the time Henderson left Berlin the German attack on Poland would presumably have begun. Did Hitler think that the British would abandon the Polish alliance on sight of his offer? Had he forgotten his own time-table? Or was advancing the date of attack to 26th August a bluff all along?

The last seems the most probable explanation. All afternoon on 25th August Hitler raged round the Chancellery. At 3 p.m. he ordered the attack to proceed. Three hours later Attolico, the Italian ambassador, brought the news that Italy could not enter the war unless she received vast quantities of raw materials



*Henderson (second from left), escorted by German officials, arrives to see Hitler on night of 30th-31st August. He had come to ask for time to start talks—but time had run out*

which Germany was in no position to supply. Immediately afterwards Ribbentrop reported that the Anglo-Polish treaty had been formally signed in London. Hitler pulled back. He summoned Keitel, the chief-of-staff, and said: 'Stop everything at once. I need time for negotiations.' The attack on Poland was called off at the last moment.

The British government seemed to have committed themselves for good when they signed the alliance with Poland, particularly as it included a guarantee of Danzig. Their real attitude was quite different: they were still eager to sell out. The Foreign Office drafted terms for an offer to Hitler which stated that Danzig should have 'the right to determine its political allegiance', and Halifax, the foreign secretary, told the Polish ambassador that the Polish government would make a great mistake if they ruled out 'peaceful modifications of the status of Danzig'. Hitler and the British government thus agreed how negotiations should end—with a Polish surrender. The problem was how to get negotiations started. The two sides circled round each other like wrestlers before a clinch. The British offered to arrange direct negotiations between Germany and Poland if Hitler promised to behave peacefully. Hitler answered that there would be no war if he got his way over Danzig.

Göring, who did not want war, now

called in an unofficial intermediary, a Swedish businessman called Dahlerus. Dahlerus flew to London on 25th August and back to Berlin on 26th August; to London and back on 27th August; and the same again on 30th August. In Berlin he saw Göring and sometimes Hitler. In London he saw Chamberlain and Halifax. Each side got the impression that the other was weakening. Both wanted another Munich, but on favourable terms, and neither side knew how to push the Poles over the brink.

On 28th August Henderson delivered the British reply to Hitler's last offer. The British government urged that there should be direct negotiations between Germany and Poland. If these reached agreement, the way would be open for 'a wider and more complete agreement between Germany and Great Britain'. Hitler had repeatedly declared that, as his offers to Poland had been rejected in the spring, he would never negotiate directly with the Poles again. On the other hand, Henderson made no objection when Hitler said that negotiations must involve a Polish surrender over Danzig and the Corridor. Thus Hitler thought he would succeed either way. If the Poles yielded, he would get Danzig and the Corridor. If they refused, the British government would repudiate them. He decided to accept direct negotiations, but to do it in such a way that Germany would still seem to be



dictating to both Great Britain and Poland.

On 29th August Hitler saw Henderson again and delivered his answer. He agreed to direct negotiations, but a Polish representative, with full powers, must arrive in Berlin within the next twenty-four hours. Henderson objected that this was an ultimatum. Hitler and Ribbentrop answered, with typical German pedantry, that the word 'ultimatum' nowhere appeared in the German note. Ultimatum or not, Henderson was eager to accept it. Hitler's offer, he telegraphed to London, was 'the sole chance of preventing war'. Henderson urged acceptance on everybody – on his own government, on the French, on the Poles. He hurried round to Lipski and urged immediate acceptance. Lipski was unmoved and did not even report Hitler's offer to Warsaw. The French were as resolute in the opposite direction. Bonnet telegraphed to Beck that he should go to Berlin at once.

Decision rested with the British government. Here was the proposal they had always wanted: direct negotiations between Germany and Poland. Hitler had agreed. Now they could not deliver the Poles. Chamberlain told Kennedy that he was 'more worried about getting the Poles to be reasonable than the Germans'. And with reason. Beck replied firmly: 'If invited to Berlin of course he would not go, as he had no intention of being treated like President Hácha.' (President Emil Hácha of Czechoslovakia had, five months before on 15th March, been forced by Hitler, Göring, and Ribbentrop to sign away his country's independence.) The British government had to make a temporizing reply, which Henderson delivered only twenty-five minutes after midnight on 30th August, that is after the German 'ultimatum' had run out. The British welcomed Hitler's proposal, but they asked him to wait a bit – they could not produce a Polish representative at such short notice.

Hitler meanwhile had prepared terms which he would present to the Poles. They were for him moderate: immediate return of Danzig and a plebiscite in the Corridor. Henderson thought that these terms were 'not unreasonable'. Back at the British embassy, he summoned Lipski and urged him to seek an interview with Ribbentrop at once. Lipski refused and went back to bed. The next morning Göring sent Dahlerus to Henderson with the German terms in writing. Henderson again summoned Lipski, and when he refused to come, sent Dahlerus round to him. Lipski was still obstinate. He declared that 'German morale was weakening and that the present regime would soon crack'. Dahlerus reported his failure to London and added that the German terms were 'extremely

reasonable'. The British agreed. Henderson telegraphed to London that 'on German offer war should be completely unjustifiable', and Halifax telegraphed to Warsaw: 'I do not see why Polish government should feel difficulty about authorising Polish Ambassador to accept a document from the German government.'

Hitler's manoeuvre was succeeding. A breach was opening between Poland and her Western allies. But Hitler was trapped by his own time-table. He had repeatedly declared to his generals that he would either produce a Polish surrender by 1st September or go to war. He dared not face their contempt if he confessed failure. Besides, military action could not be improvised at a moment's notice. If the attack planned for 1st September were called off, it would have to be postponed for many weeks or even months. All the British messages had been intercepted, and Hitler knew how anxious the British government were to surrender. He had to gamble that they would surrender even if war against Poland had started. In this tight situation he had no choice if he were to maintain his prestige. Maybe too, he liked gambling. As he told Göring: 'I always call *va banque*. It is the only call I know.' At 12.40 p.m. on 31st August he ordered that the attack on Poland should proceed.

At 1 p.m. Lipski asked to see Ribbentrop. He was asked whether he was coming as a plenipotentiary. He replied: 'No, as ambassador.' This was enough for Hitler. The Poles were still obstinate. At 4 p.m. Hitler confirmed the order for war. At 6.30 p.m. Lipski at last saw Ribbentrop. Lipski said that the Poles were 'favourably considering' the idea of direct negotiations. Ribbentrop again asked whether he was a plenipotentiary. Lipski again said no. Ribbentrop did not communicate the German terms. If he had tried to do so, Lipski would have refused to receive them. The Poles had kept their nerve unbroken to the last moment. At 4.45 a.m. on 1st September the German forces attacked Poland without warning or pretext. At 6 a.m. German aeroplanes bombed Warsaw.

#### *Trapped into war*

The ally of Great Britain and France had been wantonly attacked. It only remained for them to declare war on the aggressor. They did nothing of the kind. The two governments merely 'warned' Hitler that they might have to go to war unless he desisted. Meanwhile they hoped that Mussolini would save them as he had done during the Czech crisis, and he duly did his best. He proposed a European conference to survey all causes of conflict, with the condition that Danzig should return to Germany at once. Hitler replied that he would answer on 3rd September.

The British and French governments were therefore desperate to postpone any action until that day. But they, too, were trapped – by the indignation of British opinion. The French remained supine. The British were in an uproar. At the very least, German troops must be withdrawn from Poland before the proposal for a conference was accepted. Mussolini knew that this was hopeless and dropped his proposal. The British and French governments went on hoping for a conference which was already dead.

On the evening of 2nd September Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons. MP's expected to hear that war had been declared. Instead Chamberlain said that, if the German government would agree to withdraw their troops from Poland (not actually to withdraw them), the British government would forget everything that had happened, and diplomacy could start again. Chamberlain sat down in dead silence. Greenwood, rising to speak for Labour, was greeted with a shout from Amery: 'Speak for England, Arthur.' Afterwards Greenwood warned Chamberlain that there would be no holding the House if war were not declared. The cabinet met late at night and resolved that an ultimatum should be sent to Germany at once. Halifax, who regretted this decision, put off the ultimatum until the next morning.

The British ultimatum was delivered in Berlin at 9 a.m. on 3rd September. The German government made no reply, and the ultimatum expired at 11 a.m. The French trailed after their ally and declared war at 5 p.m. The Second World War had begun. It is possible that Hitler intended to conquer Europe at some time. It is also possible, though less likely, that the British government intended at some time to resist him. Neither of these intentions caused the actual outbreak of war. Then Hitler merely wanted Danzig and the Corridor, and the British government wanted to give them to him. These plans were wrecked first by Polish obstinacy and then by the indignation of Conservative backbenchers. The very men who had applauded Munich now insisted on war.

There was much talk later about a crusade against fascism. In fact most countries were pushed into war. The Poles had no choice. The French were dragged along by the British. Russians and Americans, mighty boasters both, waited supinely until Hitler chose to attack them. Only the British people and their dominions went to war of their own free will. They were not concerned about fascism. They did not even save Poland. They went to war out of national pride and for the sake of national honour. Ultimately they brought Hitler down, and this was something to be proud of.



Europe, 1938-39

# The Nazi-Soviet Pact

*If there was one certainty in the confused diplomacy of the 1930's it was that the Nazis and the Communists were total enemies. Then, in August 1939 came a pact that startled the world. A Soviet historian argues that it was not the cold-blooded piece of Realpolitik it appeared and a Western historian replies*

## **THE SOVIET-GERMAN TREATY OF 1939 / A.O.Chubaryan**

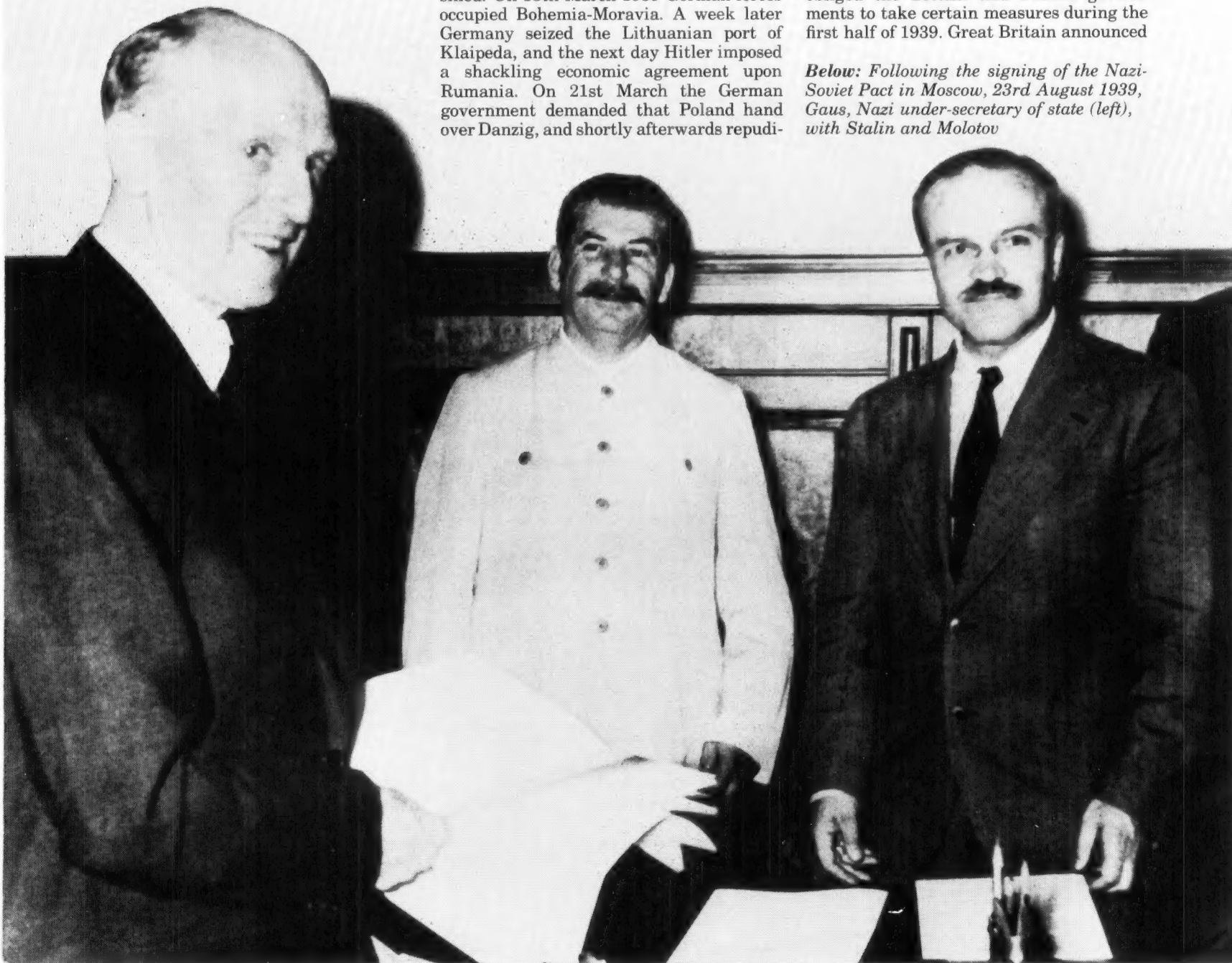
Thirty years have passed since the Soviet-German Treaty was signed, but to this day the strong feelings it aroused have not calmed down: discussions and intense arguments still go on about the nature of this treaty, about the circumstances in which it was made, and about its consequences.

After the Munich agreement had been signed on 30th September 1938 (p. 1626), events in Europe developed along two different lines. On the one hand, the aggressive behaviour of Germany was intensified. On 15th March 1939 German forces occupied Bohemia-Moravia. A week later Germany seized the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda, and the next day Hitler imposed a shackling economic agreement upon Rumania. On 21st March the German government demanded that Poland hand over Danzig, and shortly afterwards repudi-

ated their pact of non-aggression with Poland. In April Germany's ally Italy grabbed Albania. Thus, the appetite of the Nazis was growing, aggressive deeds were being committed one after another, and the danger of war in Europe was becoming more and more evident.

On the other hand, Great Britain and France continued to follow their policy of appeasing the aggressor, which had culminated in the Munich agreement with Hitler and Mussolini. However, Germany's aggressions, and the increasing alarm caused in Europe by the fascist aggressors, obliged the British and French governments to take certain measures during the first half of 1939. Great Britain announced

*Below: Following the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in Moscow, 23rd August 1939, Gaus, Nazi under-secretary of state (left), with Stalin and Molotov*





on 31st March that she guaranteed the independence of Poland, and this was followed by guarantees to Greece and Rumania on 13th April and to Turkey on 12th May. France endorsed these British guarantees. At the same time, Great Britain and France agreed to begin negotiations with the Soviet Union for joint resistance to Hitler's aggression.

On 18th March the Soviet government handed a special note to Schulenburg, the German ambassador in Moscow, stating that it did not recognize the inclusion of Czechoslovakia in the German Reich. On the same day the USSR proposed that a conference of the states concerned be convened to discuss the situation caused by the German threat to Rumania. The British government said it considered such a conference to be premature, and in mid-April proposed that the USSR guarantee Poland and Rumania against possible German aggression.

Later, Great Britain repeated her proposal, with the aim of binding the USSR to go immediately to the aid of Poland and Rumania if Hitler should decide to attack these countries, and also in case Hitler were to turn westward. But the British government did not want to give similar guarantees against possible German attacks on Latvia, Estonia, or Finland, although from the point of view of the USSR attacks on the Baltic countries would represent no less danger than attacks on Rumania or Poland.

The calculation made by the leaders of British and French foreign policy became clear. They wished to make sure of Soviet aid in the event of attacks by Germany on those countries in which Great Britain and France were interested, but they had no intention of undertaking similar obligations towards the USSR.

The USSR put forward counter-proposals for the formation of a powerful coalition capable of resisting any aggression by Germany. For three weeks the British government left these Soviet proposals unanswered. It then tabled its own plan, which again provided only for Soviet guarantees to Poland and Rumania.

In June the Soviet government invited Halifax, the British foreign secretary, to come to Moscow; but he was unable to find the time for this visit. On 23rd July the Soviet government proposed that negotiations begin in Moscow between military representatives of the three powers, so as to agree on possible joint military action against the aggressor. Again, however, London and Paris did not hasten to answer. Nineteen days elapsed between this proposal by the Soviet government and the arrival in Moscow of the British and French missions.

The talks began in Moscow on 12th

August. The Soviet delegation was headed by the people's commissar for defence, Marshal K.E. Voroshilov, and included the commissar for the navy, the chief of General Staff of the Red Army, and his deputy, who commanded the Soviet air force. The British and French missions were headed by men of only secondary rank, without the necessary authority.

The course taken by the talks further showed that the Anglo-French side did not wish to discuss definite military plans, the conditions for allowing Soviet troops to traverse Polish and Rumanian territory, the number of divisions to be committed, and so on. The talks arrived at an impasse when Poland announced that she would not agree to allow Soviet troops to cross her territory.

About the same time, reports appeared in the press about talks going on between Great Britain and Germany. Though the details did not become known until much later, the USSR was obviously threatened by the possibility of another Munich.

It was in this situation that the German government offered the Soviet Union a pact of non-aggression. Actually, the Germans had begun sounding the USSR about the possibility of an agreement as early as the beginning of 1939. At that time the Soviet government had left these German approaches unanswered and entered into talks with Great Britain and France. When, however, in mid-August, it became more and more obvious that no agreement could be reached with Great Britain and France, the Soviet government consented to the visit by Ribbentrop to Moscow which had been proposed by the Germans.

The Anglo-French plan was to direct Germany's appetite towards the East and involve Hitler in conflict with the Soviet Union. The USSR was faced with the immediate danger of finding herself facing Hitler on her own. Munich and the subsequent negotiations provided clear proof of the unwillingness of the British and French governments to form an anti-Hitler alliance. And in these same months Soviet-Japanese relations became strained. Japanese troops invaded the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic in the area of the River Khalkhin Gol. The Soviet Union, acting in accordance with the mutual aid treaty of 1936, sent forces to help the MPR. At the very moment when fruitless negotiations were going on with the British and French in Moscow, the Red Army was engaged in battle with substantial Japanese forces.

In these circumstances the USSR was confronted with the prospect of a war on two fronts, without any allies. To ensure the country's security, the Soviet government accepted the German proposals. On 22nd August 1939 Ribbentrop arrived in

Moscow, and on the 23rd the Soviet-German Treaty of non-aggression was signed.

In signing this treaty the Soviet Union followed one of the principles of its foreign policy, namely, to make use of the contradictions between the capitalist countries. It was not easy for the Soviet Union to sign this treaty. There had to be taken into account, in the first place, the effect on public opinion of an agreement made between the land of socialism and fascist Germany, against whose policy the USSR had fought for many years. The problem was further complicated because the general public did not know about all the vagaries of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations.

In the second place, it was clear to everyone, including the USSR, that the treaty meant only a temporary postponement, that sooner or later Hitler would proceed to carry out his programme of struggle against Communism and the USSR.

The treaty with Germany was a step which the USSR was forced to take in the difficult situation that had come about in the summer of 1939. The Soviet government did not deceive itself regarding Hitler's aims. It understood that the treaty would not bring the USSR lasting peace but only a more or less lengthy breathing-space. When it signed the treaty with Germany the Soviet government undertook the task of using the time thus gained to carry through the political and military measures needed in order to ensure the country's security and strengthen its capacity for defence. (*Translation*)

## THE PACT

*'The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the USSR, and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926 between Germany and the USSR, have reached the following agreement:*

*'Article I. Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other powers.*

*'Article II. Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third party.*

*'Article III. The Government of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.*

*'Article IV. Neither of the two High Contracting Parties shall participate in*





**Left:** Soviet cartoon, 1936, sees Western capitalists as Hitler's guardian angels. Criticism stopped abruptly with signing of Nazi-Soviet Pact. **Right:** Japanese soldiers captured by Russians in Mongolia. Committed to aid Mongolia, Russia wanted to avoid war in the West

any grouping of powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

**Article V.** Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion, or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

**Article VI.** The present treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not denounce it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

**Article VII.** The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratification shall be exchanged in Berlin. The agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

#### **'Secret Additional Protocol**

'On the occasion of the signature of the Nonaggression Pact between the German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the undersigned plenipotentiaries of each of the two parties discussed in strictly confidential conversations the question of the boundary of their respective spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following conclusions:

'1. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR...

'2. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San.

'The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments. ...'

#### **The division of Poland**

'Further political developments' were provided by the Germans themselves when they invaded Poland. Four weeks later, on 28th September, Germany and the USSR carried their co-operation a step further with a treaty dividing Poland:

'The government of the German Reich and the government of the USSR consider it as exclusively their task, after the collapse of the former Polish state, to re-establish peace and order in these territories and to assure to the peoples living there a peaceful life in keeping with their national character. To this end, they have agreed upon the following:

'The government of the German Reich



*and the government of the USSR determine . . . the boundary of their respective national interests in the territory of the former Polish state . . .*

*' . . . the territory of the Lithuanian state falls into the sphere of influence of the USSR, while, on the other hand, the province of Lublin and parts of the province of Warsaw fall to the sphere of influence of Germany . . .*

*'Both parties will tolerate in their territories no Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other party. They will suppress in their territories all beginnings of such agitation and inform each other concerning suitable measures.*

#### **DIRECTING HITLER WESTWARDS** **D.C.Watt**

Any Soviet historian dealing with the history of the events leading to the outbreak of the Second World War and the subsequent Soviet involvement in it starts with four great difficulties. Firstly, despite a good degree of de-Stalinization among Soviet military historians, who now feel free to discuss Stalin's errors as a military commander, Soviet diplomatic historians are unable to admit that Stalin's and Molotov's conduct of foreign policy could in any way have been influenced by misjudgment or misinformation. Secondly, although the British, Italian, American, German, and even the Hungarian diplomatic archives have been published *in extenso*, we still have no idea what the various Soviet ambassadors were reporting, or the instructions that were going out from Moscow to them. Thirdly, despite the implications heavily underlined by Soviet historians that the British government would have preferred to find a way of avoiding war with Germany, the fact remains that Great Britain chose to fight Hitler in 1939 and the Soviet Union chose to make an agreement with him that made it possible for him to conquer all Europe between the Channel and the Soviet frontier the following summer. Fourthly, whatever else the Soviet government did during the years 1939-41, it did not 'carry through the political and military measures needed in order to secure the country's security and strengthen its capacity for defence', or at least not with any great energy, efficiency, or enthusiasm. The Soviet government dismissed the warnings that reached them, even from their own intelligence sources such as Richard Sorge in Tokyo, of imminent German attack. The German forces that attacked in June 1941 achieved complete tactical surprise; they found no fortifications to oppose them, and they virtually obliterated the Soviet armies in the west. Only the innate heroism of the Soviet people saved the Soviet Union from conquest by those with

whom a non-aggression pact had been signed two years earlier.

The inadequacies of the Soviet interpretation of the period January to August 1939 are evident, for example, on the subject of the development of British policy against Hitler. In January 1939, *before* the German invasion of Prague, the British authorities had already both expressed their anxieties lest Hitler seek new adventures in the Ukraine, and asked for concerted staff action with the French to face a possible German attack westwards. They had also begun to mend their fences with the Soviet Union, in the face of much Soviet suspicion. The British answer to the occupation of Prague and the reports of an economic ultimatum to Rumania was an immediate approach to the Soviet Union. The Soviet proposal of 18th March was in answer to this. The British proposals that the Soviet Union guarantee Rumania and Poland were, after all, only that the Soviets should follow the British example. The reason why Great Britain was reluctant to give guarantees to the Baltic states and Finland was that these states flatly refused to ask for them, and Great Britain did not wish to drive them into Germany's arms. The Baltic states also turned down the Soviet offer of a non-aggression pact preferring to conclude one with Germany. Great Britain had constantly to labour, as her published documents make clear, with the absolute refusal of the states between Germany and the Soviet Union to commit themselves in any way to contacts with the Soviet Union.

Nor does the Soviet view account for the evidence on German-Soviet relations. The German approach to the Soviet Union in January is not reflected in the German diplomatic documents (unless this is a reference to Hitler's talk at a New Year's reception with the Soviet diplomatic representative). At the end of January 1939, when Ribbentrop recalled the German trade mission to Moscow in his eagerness to obtain an agreement with Poland, German-Soviet relations were at a very low ebb. They continued that way until the reopening of contracts ostensibly *from* the Soviet side in April. (We have, of course, no way of knowing whether the Soviet representative was acting on his own, or even if the German report, prompted by the wish for better German-Soviet relations, misrepresented this initiative as coming from the Soviet side. Soviet historians who deal with this episode at all simply dismiss the German record as a forgery.) The real signal was, however, the replacement as commissar of foreign affairs of Litvinov, a Jew, by Molotov on 3rd May, an event which struck Hitler as so important that the German ambassador in Moscow was

immediately recalled to report. He advised an approach to Molotov beginning with economic affairs, and it was Molotov's remark that good economic relations were impossible unless political relations improved which encouraged the Germans to proceed. The truth is that through Sorge in Tokyo and their agents in Germany, the Soviet authorities knew that Hitler was preparing to attack the West if he could not frighten them off—and he expected the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact to do this. Yet no serious evidence has been produced which would show that British policy was directed to attempting to procure a German attack on the Soviet Union. If the Soviet leadership believed this to be the aim of British policy, they would appear to have been influenced by a major misjudgment.

The real defence of Soviet policy in 1939 is that the British were casting them in a role which if it succeeded in restraining Hitler would redound to the credit of Great Britain, whereas if it failed, the Soviet Union would have to bear the burden of fighting on land. Great Britain had no forces available for a major land offensive in Europe and the French saw no point in abandoning their fortifications. The Soviets thus had every reason for rejecting the early British proposals. The later ones, however, gave them everything they had originally asked for. It is the difficulties that Molotov made in the negotiations in June and July which make British historians suspect that Molotov was holding the option of an agreement with Germany open all the time and that the decision to conclude the agreement with Germany was not the last minute affair it is so often represented as being by Soviet historians. It is clear that despite their intelligence in the West, the Soviet military had no idea actually how weak Great Britain and France were. Otherwise the revelations made by Admiral Drax, and General Doumenc, heads of the British and French missions, would not have struck them with such suspicion.

British policy in this period is a record of misordered priorities and misunderstood information. Great Britain was much weaker than even her leaders believed; and they were attempting to create a deterrent bloc in Eastern Europe without properly considering who was to provide the real element of deterrence behind that bloc. British intelligence, partly from ideological conviction, possibly from awareness of the Soviet-German exchanges, (the Americans knew of them through the German embassy in Moscow) was dominated by suspicion of the Soviet Union. Yet in the end Great Britain was not deterred by the Nazi-Soviet Pact and went to war against the Nazi menace in September 1939.



# Teschen, Aftermath of Munich

Englishmen see the Teschen question as a Polish betrayal of Czechoslovakia. They remember only that Polish troops marched into Teschen on 2nd October 1938. Sir Winston Churchill summed up his indignation in *The Gathering Storm*, where he wrote of the Poles that: 'Over a question as minor as Teschen, they sundered themselves from (their) old friends in France, Britain and the United States. . . . We see them hurrying, while the might of Germany glowered up against them, to grasp their share of the pillage and ruin of Czechoslovakia.'

But was Teschen really a minor question in 1938, and was Polish action motivated by mere greed? The background of the Teschen conflict, and its role in Polish foreign policy during that year show it to have been the Polish reaction to the Western appeasement of Germany.

The Polish-Czechoslovak dispute over Teschen began in November 1918. The eastern districts had a preponderantly Polish population, the western districts were Czech. The local Polish and Czech councils agreed on a provisional demarcation line on 5th November, but the Czechoslovak government did not wish to lose Polish Teschen because of its valuable coal mines and railway lines. Although the head of the new Polish state, Józef Piłsudski, sent a letter to President Masaryk in December proposing a mixed commission to settle the question, he received no reply. In January 1919 the Polish government decreed parliamentary elections, which included western Teschen. On 23rd January, however, Czechoslovak troops occupied the region. It is true that the Czechoslovak government sent a proposal to Warsaw suggesting a mixed commission to decide the matter, but it arrived in the Polish capital after the Czechoslovak troops had moved in. At the Paris peace conference both sides agreed on a plebiscite, but the Czechoslovak government later withdrew its assent. Finally, in 1920, after Poland had been forced to accept a decision by the Allied powers, Teschen Silesia, except for the eastern half of the town of Teschen itself, was awarded to Czechoslovakia.

Although the loss of Polish Teschen met with bitter resentment in Poland, it did not cause an irreparable breach with Czechoslovakia. Relations between the two countries were cool because of the divergence in their foreign policy objectives and, to a lesser extent, because of their different political systems. As far as foreign policy was concerned, the major threat to Poland in the years 1920-32 was the revision of her western frontier in favour of Germany. Prague did not give Warsaw any support

**Top:** Polish volunteers march into Teschen, 2nd October 1938. Many in the West saw Poland as cynically taking advantage of Czechoslovakia's impotence to seize a coal-rich area she had unsuccessfully claimed on the break-up of Austria-Hungary after the First World War. Poland justified her act as necessary to prevent Teschen and its 228,000 inhabitants — 135,000 of them Czech — from also falling into Hitler's hands. (The territory reverted to Czechoslovakia in 1945.) **Centre:** Beck announces Czech acceptance of Poland's demands, Foreign Ministry, Warsaw, 3rd October. **Bottom:** Emotional welcome from peasant woman for General Bortnowski on arrival of Polish troops in Teschen



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because it had no wish to quarrel with Berlin. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia concluded a triple alliance with France and the USSR in 1935, while Poland mistrusted the Soviet Union and would not go beyond a non-aggression pact, concluded in 1932. Finally, Czechoslovakia was primarily concerned with checking Hungarian revisionism by means of the 'Little Entente' with Rumania and Yugoslavia. Poland, on the other hand, though possessing a defensive alliance with Rumania against the USSR, had a tradition of friendly relations with Hungary.

Despite all these policy differences, and the fact that after 1926, Poland had a semi-authoritarian government, the two countries might have achieved a common front against Germany in 1933, if the Western powers had shown willingness to support them. According to the *British Documents on Foreign Policy*, the Czechoslovak foreign minister, Eduard Beneš, told the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, in March of that year that he had recently rejected a Polish offer of alliance against Germany because Czechoslovakia did not wish to be pushed into the arms of Poland. A memorandum written for the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1938 explained this policy by stating that, in 1933, it looked as if Poland would be forced to give up Danzig and the Corridor to Germany, and Czechoslovakia did not wish to be involved on the Polish side. Since France and Great Britain at that time seriously considered meeting German demands against Poland, Czechoslovak policy was governed by this factor.

#### Implications of appeasement

As it was, on 26th January 1934 Poland signed a declaration of non-aggression with Germany. This was the Polish reaction to Western inclinations to reach agreement with Berlin at the expense of Warsaw. But, while the declaration put German demands against Poland 'on ice' and led to better relations, it was not responsible for German rearmament, the re-occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, and the annexation of Austria in March 1938. These developments could have been prevented by joint Franco-Polish action, but France would not move without British support, and Great Britain was opposed to French military action on these issues. Poland for her part could not have moved against Germany alone.

The first major crisis with Germany came when Hitler raised demands against Czechoslovakia, the ally of France. It was at this point that Teschen once again came to the fore, but the reason for its occupation in 1938 did not lie in Polish-Czechoslovak relations. It lay in the policies of Great Britain and France, for Teschen was a part of Poland's adjustment to the withdrawal of French commitments in Eastern Europe. The French government wished to preserve Czechoslovakia, but it believed that this could not be done without British support. The British Prime Minister, Sir Neville Chamberlain, however, had no intention of involving Great Britain in a war over Czechoslovakia. The records of Franco-British conversations on this subject make sad reading. The British government was unwilling even to guarantee the rest of the country after some concessions to Germany, while the French government, in case of war, was only prepared to man the Maginot Line. It was agreed

in April that London should warn Berlin against the use of force, while Paris should warn Prague not to fight, because it would not receive any aid. This was not a policy likely to stop Hitler. Meanwhile, the French foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, tried to persuade the Polish government to support the British warning to Berlin—a step which Paris did not take itself.

From the Polish point of view, the situation was extremely dangerous. Solidarity with the defensive diplomacy of London and Paris could easily have shattered the relative peace existing between Warsaw and Berlin since 1934. Hitler could then have turned from Czechoslovakia against Poland, demanding Danzig, the Corridor, and Upper Silesia. These German claims had met with sympathy in the West in 1932-33. At the same time, the interpretation of the Franco-Polish alliance of 1921 had been in dispute since 1925, so that Poland had no clear-cut guarantee of French aid if she were to be involved in war with Germany.

In this situation, the Polish foreign minister, Józef Beck, saw two alternatives, the choice of which would govern Polish policy. Either the Western powers would abandon Czechoslovakia, or they would stand up to Hitler at the risk of war. In the first case, Beck decided that Poland should try to safeguard her own interests in the following order of priority: she would try to obtain a German recognition of the free city of Danzig and of the Polish-German frontier, to regain Polish Teschen Silesia, and to create a common Polish-Hungarian frontier. The latter was to serve as the nucleus of an East European bloc, supported by Italy, and independent of both Germany and the USSR. Mussolini and Ciano had shown their interest in such a bloc, in order to check the expansion of German influence in the Balkans. If, however, France and Great Britain decided to make a stand, Poland could not be on the side of Germany, and would support the Western powers in a European war.

#### The division of Europe

In the context of these alternatives, the Polish attitude towards Teschen was a barometer reflecting Western policy towards Germany. Warsaw demanded autonomy, a plebiscite, and finally territorial cession in proportion as these demands by the Sudeten Germans, directed by Hitler, were conceded by the Western powers. After the Munich conference had ceded the Sudetenland to Germany (29th September) the Polish government demanded that Prague cede eastern Teschen Silesia to Poland. It should be noted, moreover, that in the second half of September, France and Great Britain urged Beneš to promise this region to Poland, in return for a Polish declaration of benevolent neutrality. Beneš only proposed negotiations to Warsaw but even if the transaction had been made, it would not have prevented the loss of the Sudetenland since the Western powers were determined to avoid war. Furthermore, there was a danger of German annexation since the leaders of the German minority in Teschen Silesia clamoured for union with Germany and Berlin was interested in the coal mines and the railway junction of Bohumin (Oderberg). As for Beneš, the cardinal principle of his policy was that Czechoslovakia could not fight without a guarantee of French assistance. For this reason, he did not seek an alliance with Poland and

even refused a Soviet proposal for military talks in April.

In the end, Józef Beck failed to obtain Hitler's recognition of the Polish-German frontier, because the Führer believed he could obtain concessions from Poland, and he failed to obtain a common Polish-Hungarian frontier, because Germany opposed it and Mussolini gave up his design of checking Hitler in the Balkans. The only consolation was that Teschen Silesia did not fall to Germany. Beck's grand design had failed, but it is difficult to see how, in view of the insecurity of his position, he could have followed any other policy. On the one hand, Polish diplomatic co-operation with France and Great Britain would not have saved Czechoslovakia, and might well have led to a conflict with Germany. Co-operation with the USSR, on the other hand, was out of the question for more basic reasons than Polish distrust of Moscow. The Soviet Union was not bound, according to the alliance of 1935, to intervene in the defence of Czechoslovakia unless France did so. If the Red Army intended to march, no proposals for the passage of Soviet troops were made to Poland. It is most likely that Stalin was no more willing to tangle with Hitler in 1938 than he was in 1939.

Thus, the Polish annexation of Teschen in October 1938 was part of Poland's reaction to Munich and the Franco-British abandonment of Eastern Europe which that Bavarian town symbolized. Belatedly, in March 1939, Great Britain recognized the strategic indivisibility of Europe by granting a guarantee to Poland. The lesson was to be forgotten, however, in 1945 when Eastern Europe would again be 'written off', this time to the advantage of the USSR. In 1938, as again after 1945, the division of Europe brought great suffering to millions of people and continuing insecurity instead of lasting peace. **Anna Cienciala**

*Teschen: rich province in strategic position*





PICTURE  
**POST**



AN OFFICER OF THE AUXILIARY FIRE SERVICES  
PREPARES FOR THE WORST

(See inside)

**HULTON'S  
NATIONAL  
WEEKLY**

*In this issue:*

**BRITAIN PREPARES**

**3<sup>D</sup>**

MAY 27, 1939

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Europe 1939/J.M.Roberts

# War: Shadow and Reality

*Few people wanted war in 1939. And almost no one correctly guessed what sort of a war was coming. The illusions of 1939 were not those of 1914—but they were just as powerful*

The mood of September 1939 was everywhere very different from that of August 1914. The blackout remains its best symbol. 'We tumbled into Armageddon without heart, without songs,' said Lord Boothby, looking back later on his memories of those days. It was not true only of Great Britain. In Paris the boulevard cafés were quiet and subdued when, at five o'clock in the afternoon of 3rd September, France at last went to war. Even the Nazi leaders seem to have been somewhat taken aback to learn that Great Britain had, after all, entered the war against them. Hitler (and Stalin) had not expected this war.

The general lack of enthusiasm is easy to understand. 1914 was only twenty-five years away. Too many people were still alive who remembered the way in which the intoxication of its outbreak had turned into bitter awakening as the hope of a war 'over by Christmas' faded away and the Western Front settled down to four years of blood-letting. In every country millions of families had lost men or received them back maimed, gassed, or blinded.

The unprecedented cost of the First World War had for years been a central argument of the pacifists. It had made patriotism seem an exploded ideal, as a famous vote in the Oxford Union testified. Even the defence of the ideals which replaced king and country—liberty and tolerance—seemed to be suspect if it were going to lead to conflict. Yet in the event, the Second World War was to show that patriotism still had enormous power. In its name, demands were to be made on civilians and soldiers which were greater even than those of 1914-18. They proved enduring, even if only just so. But this was not known in 1939. Because it was not, Europe went to war unwillingly, cautiously, and, on both sides, with far from grandiose aims and hopes. Very few people wanted a war in 1939 and those who did wanted a very different one from the one they got.

Besides the mass of people everywhere who remembered the slaughter of the First World War, many soldiers also drew wrong conclusions from it. The right ones were drawn by German specialists who studied

ways of restoring mobility to the battlefield by the exploitation of the new technical possibilities of tanks and motor-vehicles. Pioneer work in this field had been done outside Germany in the writings of Liddell Hart, and in the experiments with armoured and mobile forces on Salisbury Plain carried out by imaginative British soldiers. There was even an enthusiastic—though not very clear—doctrine of armoured warfare propounded in France by Marshal Pétain's young protégé, Colonel de Gaulle. The benefits of their suggestions were worked up into a strategical and tactical system by the Germans, who based on them a doctrine of armoured warfare which not only overcame the stalemate of the trenches but gave Germany an astonishing run of victories between 1939 and 1941. But elsewhere a narrower vision held sway.

This led to reliance on defensive strategy and the provision of huge armies to fight the battles of attrition which, it was believed, would again occur if either side went over to the attack. Such a view might be thought to rule out any Allied offensive thinking: without Russia on their side how could Great Britain and France provide the man-power to defeat a Germany so nearly successful against much greater odds twenty-five years before? (This was, of course, also a good argument against going to war at all in September 1939.) In any case, because of the First World War, France would have fewer young men available for call-up between 1935 and 1939 than normal and this, too, made French planning cautious. The French staff between the wars was obsessed by the myth of the 'invulnerable front'—the belief that however badly it had been battered, the French front line had never been broken. They dreamed of German offensives battering themselves to pieces against a Maginot Line infinitely stronger than the obsolete forts around Verdun which had proved so crucial in 1916. The British thought in terms of naval blockade and planned a bomber force whose purpose could not clearly be foreseen because its capacities could not be accurately assessed. They also for the first time imposed on themselves peacetime conscription to raise the huge infantry army which would be needed in France if the battles of 1914-18 were to be repeated. Mr Marquis, later Lord Woolton, did wonders at the Ministry of Supply by conjuring up from Yorkshire and Northamptonshire the miles of khaki serge and millions of boots this great force would require. Given the implications of this sort of planning, it is scarcely surprising that

*The shadow of war becomes reality. Far left: Magazine cover. In fact, many preparations were based on misconceptions about the coming war. Above left: Conscription announced, 26th April 1939. But Chamberlain's proposals only foresaw training 300,000 men for six months each. Below left: The last day of peace in the West. Elderly French couple read of German invasion of Poland*



Radio Times Hulton





most people felt so little enthusiasm about a coming war. It looked very much as if the depressing story of the land-fighting in the last war would be repeated.

There were also plenty of grounds for believing that it would be, in fact, even more unpleasant. Not only soldiers but civilians too, it seemed, were to be slaughtered on a vast scale. This was a half-truth. By 1945 it had become more true, but it was not so in 1939 nor for a long time after. The illusion arose from a quite unrealistic view of the possibilities of air-power, the biggest single source of terror and alarm in 1939.

It was revealed in the panic shown in Paris two days before war and by the gloomy resignation evident in the many English accounts of reactions to the air-raid sirens which began to sound within a few minutes of the end of Chamberlain's broadcast on Sunday morning, 3rd September. Such reactions could be justified by official fears. The British government had already prepared for casualties on a scale only nuclear weapons could have produced. Even the Germans were to show exaggerated alarm at the prospect of the bombing of their cities. But when they came, enormous efforts to bomb civilians achieved little of military significance and did not for a long time inflict casualties at anything like the rate feared. And, except in Poland, for the first few months of the war hardly a bomb of the very few dropped by the major combatants was not aimed at a military or naval target.

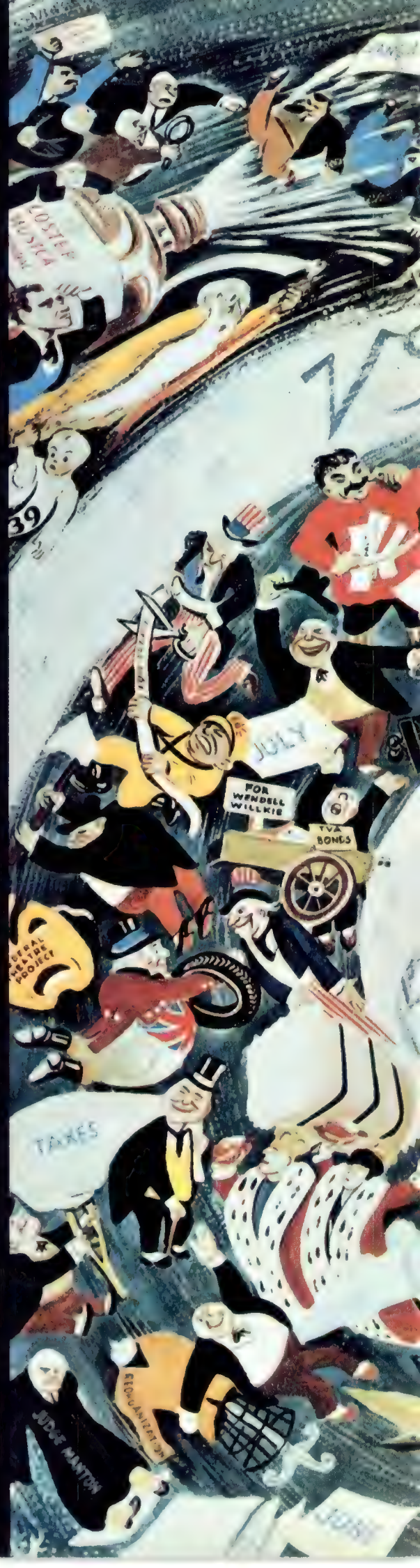
Yet people were not frightened without reason. Apostles of air power had been hammering away at the public since the early 1920's. There was uncertainty about what the bombing of the First World War showed, but the British government of 1918 had thought it worthwhile to prepare an independent bombing force for attacks on German cities as far away as Berlin. Later evidence seemed more alarming still. The RAF had an excellent record of using bombing as an economical way of bringing overwhelming force to bear. An economical campaign whose central feature had been bombing by a flight of D.H.9's had disposed of the 'Mad Mullah' in British Somaliland in 1919, and shown the possibilities of the new arm. The RAF then policed Iraq successfully and cheaply with 20-lb bombs and also used aircraft with great effect on the north-west frontier of India. Meanwhile, American experiments with surrendered German vessels had shown that battleships could be sunk by bombers (curiously, the only people who seem to have found this hard to accept were some sailors). It was also known that interception was very difficult; Stanley Baldwin was, rightly, putting the expert's view when he told his countrymen that 'the bomber will always get through'. In speed and fire-power, it was

clear, the superiority of fighters over bombers was by no means decisive until late in the 1930's, and even then, it was known, the RAF were putting into squadron service a very fast new bomber, the Blenheim, and the Americans were building a monster which, even in its early form, positively bristled with machine-guns and was dubbed the 'Flying Fortress'.

This was depressing enough, though difficult to interpret. The evidence of bombing in war was even more frightening. The Japanese in China inflicted heavy casualties and caused panics in the Chinese cities. They sank an American gunboat, the *Panay*, whose ancient Lewis guns proved an inadequate defence. The Italians harried the Ethiopians with bombing, and later spread mustard-gas on them from the air, too. Finally, there was Spain. What happened there was generally misinterpreted but of the greatest importance. The word 'Guernica' virtually brought thought to a close on the question of strategic bombing. Because of the tragedy inflicted on this tiny place, it was overlooked that Spanish conditions were likely to be very untypical. Even the German air commander, flushed with success, forgot that the Republican forces had only ancient aircraft, few guns, and almost no warning devices to protect their cities, which were, in any case, only a few minutes' flying time from the airfields of their enemies. Yet the Republic was not beaten by bombing. Nor did anyone point out that the Condor Legion and the Italian air force had helped Franco most not by attacking civilians but by supporting land operations. It tended to be forgotten that Madrid had not, after all, been bombed into surrender, nor had it been razed to the ground.

Instead, the most exaggerated conclusions were drawn. It was assumed that aerial bombardment of civilians could be expected to be even worse in future than it was supposed to have been in Spain. New horrors were envisaged. The British government decided to anticipate gas warfare on a huge scale and issued gasmasks to the entire population. There were three main styles: service respirators for the armed forces, a lighter model for firemen and others who might have to move about for long periods during attacks, and the standard civilian model. This last was to be worn (alongside various special de-

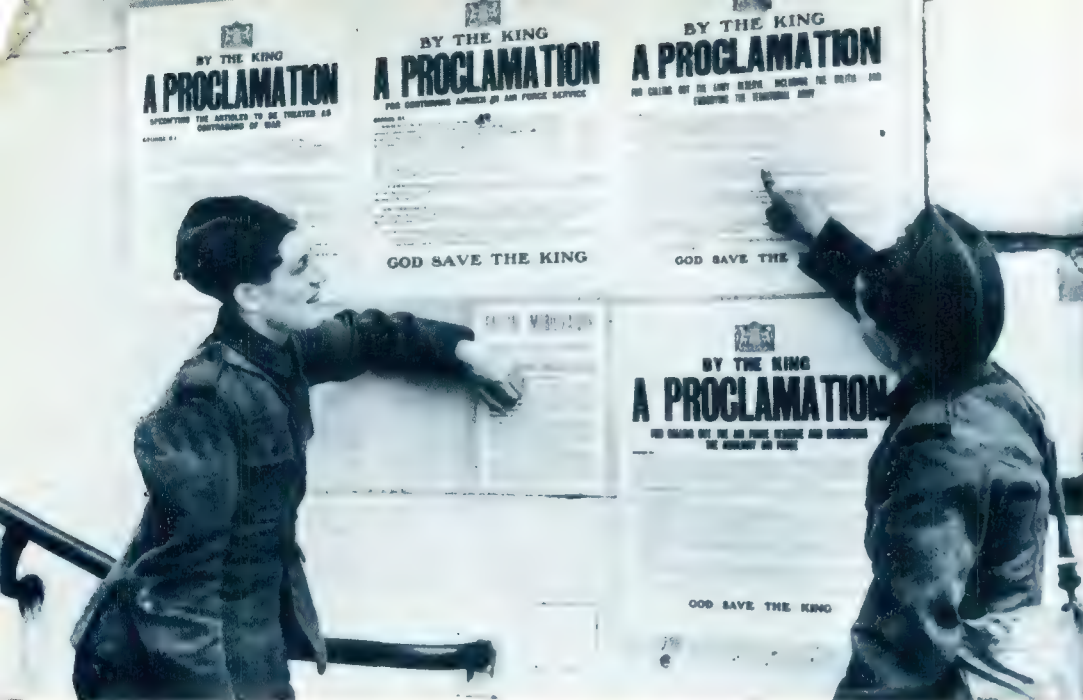
*Right: 'A.D. 1939', illustration from US magazine, Fortune. The United States was preoccupied with domestic problems — strikes, unemployment, and heavy taxation. These are represented alongside events leading up to war in Europe — Hitler strangles Czechoslovakia, Mussolini seizes Albania, the Nazi-Soviet Pact is signed. When war comes, the US economy booms*











vices like Mickey Mouse gasmasks for children and gas-proof hoods for babies) by the wretched civilians while they cowered in their new Anderson shelters. This simple contraption of corrugated iron was indeed to prove of the greatest value when bombing did begin; it saved many lives. But its issue on a large scale, like that of gasmasks, may have helped to spread a sense of impending disaster. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that 'ARP' (Air Raid Precautions) inoculated people with the idea that something useful could be done to limit disaster. Perhaps they were less fearful in September 1939 than a year before.

Most countries did not go so far as this. But they usually had public shelters built, posters about the dangers of bombing prepared, some scheme of evacuating vulnerable sections of the population from large cities (England's was the biggest), and frequent tests of air-raid sirens. Small boys in England collected cigarette cards in those days and one enterprising firm issued a set about 'ARP'. Books and pamphlets about air-raids sold well.

All this produced a very pessimistic state of mind. It did not mean that there was general panic in any country, but there is something in the view that much of the pre-war success of Germany was based on propaganda about the German air force which weakened the will to resist. When the sirens began to sound a few minutes after the British declaration of war and after Warsaw had already been heavily bombed, people braced themselves for an ordeal they had already feared for months or perhaps even years. Yet it did not come. The sirens were followed by a long winter of anti-climax. Only Poland suffered what had been feared and even there it was by destroying the Polish air force on the ground and by pounding the Polish army thus deprived of air cover that the Luftwaffe contributed most to German success.

The collapse of Poland in a few weeks was to expose another illusion of Allied (though not of German) military thinking. This was



**Top left:** British soldiers read the King's proclamations on 4th September 1939 calling up army and air force reserves. Conscription was in theory extended to the age of 41, but it moved slowly: by May 1940 only men to the age of 27 had registered. (Conscription for women began in December 1941.) **Centre left:** 28th August 1939—Parisian women sign on for Red Cross work. As tension grew in Europe many women volunteered for auxiliary service. **Bottom left:** Fortune illustration, July 1939. Anti-Nazi feeling was on the increase in the US, and to avoid clashes New York's police were ordered to remain 'neutral' in demonstrations



that of the superiority of defence. Recalling the vast efforts needed to achieve decisive victory in the field twenty-five years before, French planning, for example, assumed that a Polish resistance of several months could confidently be anticipated during which appreciation could be made of the situation on the Western Front and mobilization could steadily assemble the huge forces required for operations in the spring of 1940 when the campaigning season reopened. Given Poland's enormous and exposed frontier, this was imperceptive. Of course, as they showed by their delay in actually entering the war, the French commanders were also obsessed with the danger which threatened a 1914-style mobilization if it were interrupted by enemy attack – now possible from the air.

Winston Churchill had written in 1924 that 'the campaign of 1919 was never fought; but its ideas go marching along' and the persistence of the defensive mentality in France and Great Britain after the collapse of Poland is a fine example of this. Tied down by their own fears, undisturbed because of Hitler's wish to avoid conflict in the West while there still seemed a chance of the Allies getting out of a war he had never expected them to enter, they declined to abandon the illusions which the Polish campaign should have shattered.

There were many lessons to be learned from the German victory there. It was not to be explained by the Russian stab in the back; the German army had already won, though, of course, it had been helped by the need of the Poles to detach badly-needed forces to guard their eastern frontier. This success was won by a technique which was to carry German arms to victory for two more years and almost to overthrow Russia. It depended strategically on limited aims (Poland was virtually an isolated theatre) and tactically on the combination of armoured, mobile, and air warfare. One army, at least, had learned some lessons in Spain. While the German air force – or its commander, Göring – might

*The fears of 1939. Top right: French poster, 1939, urges the Daladier government to make good the inadequacies of the French air force. The Popular Front had underestimated the need for national defence and left France weak before the Nazi threat. Centre right: Air Raid Precautions poster urges women to join the voluntary services. Bottom right: German cartoon of August 1939 ridicules British obsession for gasmasks. The British government, it says, has forgotten Germany's man-eating sharks. Far right: Evacuees, with belongings and address tags, wait to leave London. But the city's ordeal was not to come in 1939*

Institute of Social History, Amsterdam



Imperial War Museum



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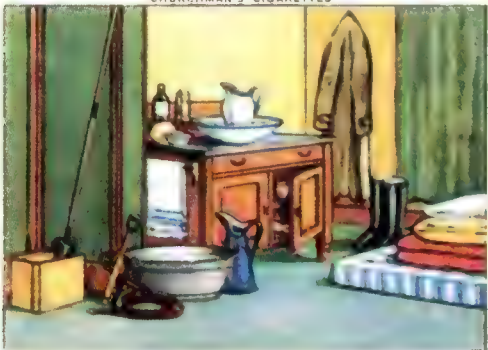




REMOVAL OF INCENDIARY BOMB WITH SCOOP AND HOE



THE CIVILIAN RESPIRATOR—HOW TO ADJUST IT



EQUIPPING YOUR REFUGE ROOM—B



TYPES OF SPLINTER-PROOF WALL

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indulge themselves with the illusion of air-power as a weapon to use against civilian centres, serious German military planning recognized that the value of the aeroplane had been shown in Spain as an auxiliary to land forces. These forces themselves were well on the way to recovering the power of the offensive through the use of tanks and of motorized troops to support them. From this combination, backed up by tactical air-power, came the doctrine of the Blitzkrieg, the single-campaign, knock-out war, cheap to run and over in a few weeks in the field, supported by a propaganda barrage and indiscriminate bombing to disorganize administration and break the civilian will to resist. Relatively small forces had experimented with the method in Spain; in Poland it received the full-scale exposition for the first time.

Even this did not disturb the illusions of many Frenchmen and Englishmen about the nature of the war they were just entering. It must be said, too, that the very success of the method was, in the end, to lead to faulty appreciations on the German side as well. The Allies continued to prepare for a long war, confident in the power of the Royal Navy to bring Germany to its knees by economic blockade. Whatever its success in 1918, blockade was to prove ineffectual, simply because of the much greater area which became available for German economic exploitation after 1939.

#### *The political nature of the war*

Besides the psychological and military illusions amid which the war began, it also presented some odd political ideas. War had been in the air of Europe since 1936 at least, yet the war that began in 1939 was in many ways far from the expected

*Left: 1 Four cigarette cards from a series on Air Raid Precautions. They show how to remove incendiary bombs, how to adjust a gasmask, how to equip a refuge room, and different types of splinter-proof walls.*

*2 Chamberlain with his parliamentary private secretary, Lord Dunglass (Alec Douglas-Home), leaving Number 10 for the House of Commons as war becomes a fact. Lord Dunglass carries his gasmask.*

*3 Children receive instruction in the use of gasmasks. Many children had special Mickey Mouse masks but military masks are being used here. The British government feared gas warfare on a huge scale and issued masks to the entire population. The fears proved groundless: gas was not used except in concentration camps.*

*Right: 1 Germany's preparations for war on the home front: ration cards are distributed at a Berlin depot, 29th August. 2 After the outbreak. A West London police station is heavily sandbagged as a protection against German air attack*



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one, except for the basic fact that in the end France and Great Britain found themselves at war with Germany. It had always been difficult to believe—except, apparently, in the Kremlin—that Great Britain and France could have ever found themselves entering a war on the side of Germany, so to that extent people were prepared for what happened. But around this central situation were grouped others, which few could have confidently envisaged until very late in the day.

One early illusion to be pricked had been that Italy might be persuaded to stand in line with France and Great Britain against Germany. That had probably been a non-starter since the Ethiopian crisis; certainly it was one since the Spanish war, whatever Chamberlain hoped. On the other hand, the Axis had increasingly seemed to be a solid bloc and many assumed that ideology and interest would bring Mussolini into the field beside Hitler. This proved an illusion, too. Italy's weakness (her frightening strength was another myth of the era) kept Mussolini out and it does not appear that the Germans much minded. They wished, after all, to fight a limited war, not a world war: though the one they got was not quite what they had hoped for, it soon seemed to offer prospects of an early peace. When the war began it was, in their eyes, war about German hegemony in Eastern Europe and the involvement of Italy could only have a limited and temporary value. In the event it was to prove not even to have that.

That the war began on one relatively simple and German issue was another way in which it was different from the First World War. Although it was in the end to spread even more, the war in 1939 was nothing like so widespread as that of 1914. In Europe there was no South-Eastern Front and the Eastern was quickly closed down by the defeat of Poland. Belgium was undisturbed. At sea, there were to be, as in 1914, a few raiders loose from the start and a few British naval vessels and many merchantmen lost to prowling U-boats, but this was not to be a major problem until Germany had bases in France and Norway. Otherwise, there were no hostilities outside Europe, as there had been in 1914. Great Britain and France might have great colonial empires; the Germans did not. There was no world war as yet; what had been started was an Anglo-French struggle against Germany in which, thanks to the absence of Russia from the scale, the odds were much more in Germany's favour than they had been in 1914. Because of the purely European issue at stake, it was inconceivable that the United States would come in if the Germans avoided the mistakes of their predecessors in 1916.

A war of this kind had been foreseen by

almost no one. Some people had expected and hoped for some sort of ideological line-up of Left versus Right. This was another illusion, owing much to the war in Spain and the false hopes generated by the Popular Front (p. 1542). To many people, those days had simplified European politics by dividing nations into two camps, the goodies and the baddies, as it were. On the one side were the democracies, on the other side the dictators. It was accepted that right-wing elements in the democracies would not find this agreeable, especially when, with extraordinary self-delusion, those who favoured this ideological view of European affairs wanted to welcome Soviet Russia to the ranks of the democracies. Many of them were angered by what they believed to be the British and French unwillingness to co-operate with the Russian government before Munich and afterwards. What they were not prepared for was the Russians' own action in coming to terms with the Germans in the Nazi-Soviet Pact and a new partition of Poland. This has been discussed elsewhere; here it is only important to notice that whatever else it represented, the Nazi-Soviet Pact killed one view of European politics which had been especially influential before the war, while at the same time making war possible. At the same time it meant for many people a break with Communism which was final.

#### *A crusading war*

A crusading war against German dictatorship and all its horrible accompaniments was in fact only to be constituted by the later actions of the Germans themselves. The French and British simply went to war because an ally was attacked. Meanwhile, the absence of Italy from the German side also helped to make the war at its outset much less ideological than many people would have liked. Nor was its outbreak over a guarantee to Poland more likely to make the war ideologically respectable. Poland, after all, was one of the spoilers of Czechoslovakia a year before and however the regime which ruled it might be described it was by no means what many Western liberals meant by democratic. The Communists behaved in the most logical and most foolish way by simply switching their propaganda almost from the moment of the Nazi-Soviet Pact (though at the cost of a party leadership crisis in England). A campaign for alliance with Russia in opposition to the fascist menace was transformed overnight into attacks on capitalist and imperialist war-mongering. This soon became outright sedition and defeatism aimed at obstructing the war effort against Hitler. A few months before it had been the French Right asking whether Frenchmen wanted to die

for Danzig; now the French Communist Party was asking whether the French worker wanted to die for his boss's dividends.

Yet, oddly enough, there seems in Great Britain to have been some dim vision of what was really at stake, even though this was only slowly to be revealed. There is no satisfactory way of explaining the way in which Chamberlain's government found itself within an inch of losing touch with the country except to allow that, somehow, the country as a whole had come to the view that a halt had to be called to a terrible danger. Few, perhaps, could have been sure of what sort of danger, though Churchill had long grasped the nature of the 'horrors' which threatened Europe. He summed up his view of British war aims—still ahead of those of many of his colleagues—to the House of Commons on 3rd September: 'This is not a question of fighting for Danzig or fighting for Poland. We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny and in defence of all that is most sacred to man.'

Most people still found it difficult to go so far. Like the fears and illusions which had been entertained before 1939, these words were only to be justified by time. In this respect, too, a great deal of blood had to flow before the war which began in 1939 could live up to expectations and fears of it. And, it must be said, in some ways it never did, though the American bombing offensive against Japan seems to have been a decisive blow, and the Russian Front produced fighting of the scale and ferocity of Verdun and Passchendaele. In the end, too, the Germans created the international solidarity against them which many had hoped for in 1939 and failed to find. But this was partly because of a surprise: the horrifying sense which gradually dawned that fighting the Nazis was not like fighting the Kaiser.

The sense came slowly because of a last and most defensible misinterpretation of the lessons of 1914-18. Though that war had steadily become more and more terrible in its scale and demands, and even though what an earlier era would have called methods of barbarism spread as unarmed ships were sunk without warning and civilians were bombed, it had remained 'civilized'. Consequently it was still true in 1939 that few outside Germany could have envisaged the fate that awaited the Polish Jews or that the methods of the Gestapo would be extended to cover a continent. Such an illusion seems in retrospect to speak in favour of the era. Pessimistic though they might be and uninspired by the excitements of 1914, the nations stumbled into war in 1939, sensing something of what was to come, but, mercifully, very little. Some nightmares, at least, were still undreamed.



# The Military Balance

*In 1939, Germany was prepared materially and psychologically for war. How near to matching her massive arms production and her fighting spirit were her opponents at the outbreak—France, Great Britain, Poland?*

Germany, from a population a little under sixty-five millions, lost in the First World War just under two millions killed. Despite their support for Hitler and their enthusiasm for the successful outcome of his early military adventures, the German people dreaded another war no less than those of other nations. The generals and admirals, while willing to contemplate war to redress what they saw as the iniquities of the Versailles Treaty, knew in 1939 the work of rearmament and expansion to be far from complete. Yet events were to show the Germans better equipped psychologically, technically, and materially to fight again than the nations who watched the reappearance of German power with fascinat-

ed alarm and growing—if supine—horror.

The Versailles Treaty limited the German army to 100,000 and forbade Germany tanks, heavy artillery, aircraft, gas, submarines, and a general staff. General Hans von Seeckt, head of the Reichswehr from 1920 to 1926, rigorously selected officers and men, re-established discipline and professionalism, and sought to combine the old Prussian tradition with a more modern and flexible spirit. Against the day of expansion, officers and men were prepared for

*German pilots before their Henschel Hs 123s strap on parachutes, 1937. These aircraft were to furnish tactical support to the army in the early months of the war*







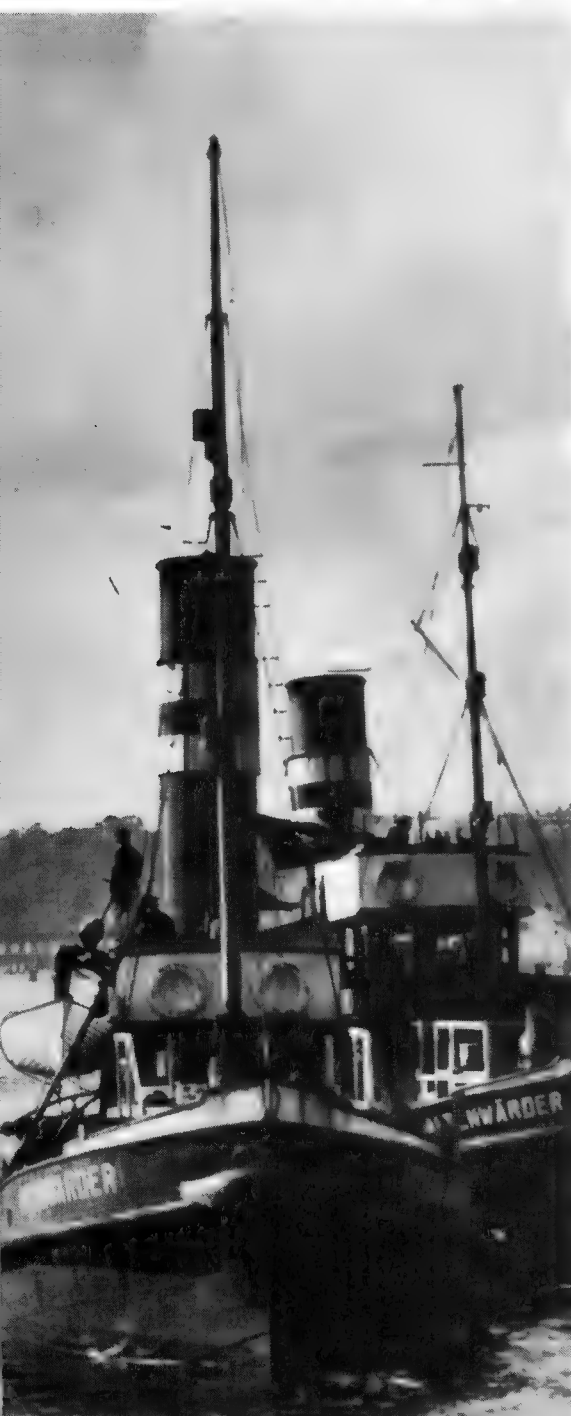
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higher rank and secret arrangements enabled the training of personnel and development of the forbidden weapons to be carried out abroad.

When expansion came Seeckt would have preferred an élite striking force of some 2-300,000 backed by a national militia—de Gaulle advocated something similar for France. Hitler, however, demanded a modernized version of the old mass Imperial Army. In October 1934 he announced the expansion of the Reichswehr to 300,000, then in March 1935 denounced the Versailles Treaty, proclaimed conscription, and set the strength of the army at 600,000 and thirty-six divisions. By 1939 it had reached a peace-time strength of 730,000 with 1,100,000 in the reserves.

An increase in strength by eighteen times in seven years was far greater than anything contemplated by Seeckt, and only a minority of the officers and experts needed could be found in the Reichswehr. Every possible source was tapped for the rest—police, Party organizations, former officers of the Imperial Army, and, of course, mass intake and training of the young. The Nazi philosophy lent itself to rigorous training and discipline, and a combination of extreme standardization in training and equipment, on the one hand, with encouragement of initiative and flexibility in action, on the other, was remarkably successful in the rapid production of highly effective forces.

Although he failed to appreciate the full potential of the tank, Seeckt had believed in the traditional Prussian strategy of dynamic mobility. Heinz Guderian, a young infantry captain appointed in 1922 to the motor transport staff, became the leading German proponent of armoured warfare. As chief of staff to the director of motorized troops in 1931, pressing for armoured divisions, he met the same sort of opposition that had appeared in other armies, but Hitler, when he came to power, took up the idea. 'That's what I need,' he exclaimed when he first saw Guderian's armour, 'that's what I want to have!'

An experimental armoured division took part in the summer exercises of 1935, and that autumn the first three armoured divisions were formed. Next year they were

formed into an armoured corps, while three light divisions—a throwback to earlier doctrine—and four motorized divisions were formed. Massed armour appeared in the manoeuvres of 1937 and again in 1938. In March 1937, under Guderian, one armoured and one SS motorized division entered Vienna, having driven 420 miles in forty-eight hours. The Panzers of the Second World War had appeared.

When the army mobilized in September 1939 there were six armoured, four light (later converted to armoured), four motorized, and eighty-four infantry divisions. There was, however, a shortage of the later types of tanks—even in May 1940 only some 600 of the new Panzerkampfwagen (armoured fighting vehicle) III and IV had reached the armoured divisions, which had over 300 modern Czech tanks and about 1,500 of the older, lightly armoured and armed, Pzkw I and II. The superiority of the forceful, energetic Panzer groups lay in their organization into self-contained divisions and corps, and in their insistence on using these forces massed for a breakthrough in depth.

At the head of the army, generals such as Brauchitsch, Halder, Rundstedt and Bock were orthodox, able, and more forceful, though little younger, than their French opponents. It was at the next level that the architects of victory were to be found: Guderian, 51, commanding XIX Panzer Corps, Manstein, 52, who devised the plan that routed the French, and Rommel, 46, a divisional commander in France.

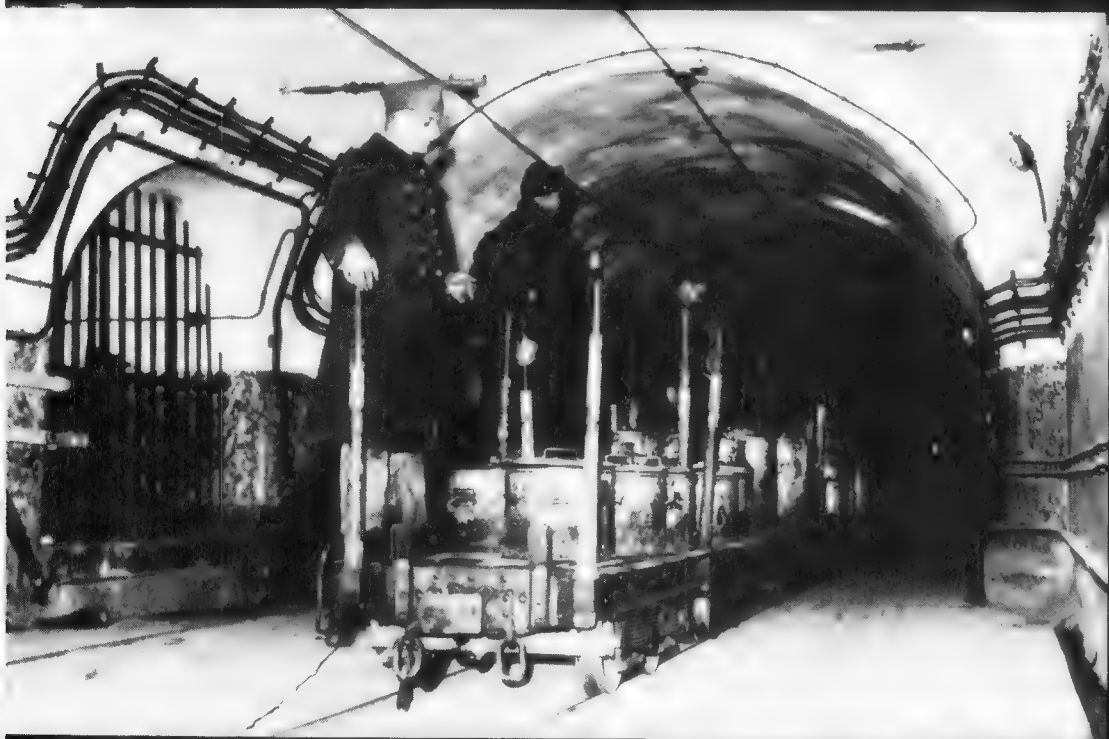
Limited under the Versailles Treaty to warships of 10,000 tons, Germany had built three 'pocket battleships'. Planned as commerce raiders, more powerful than any cruiser and faster than most battleships, these caused anxiety in Great Britain. The new German submarine force that began to appear under Admiral Dönitz caused less, for it was believed that the new sound-echo system Asdic (later Sonar) would deal with submarine attack. By September 1939 two new 31,000-ton fast battle-cruisers, the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*, had been completed, and, in addition to the pocket battleships, there were one new heavy cruiser, five light cruisers, seventeen destroyers, and fifty-six submarines.

Grand-Admiral Raeder had counted on a much stronger navy for war against Great Britain, for under his Plan Z four 42,000-ton battleships were being built or projected, besides an aircraft-carrier, two more heavy cruisers, and a large ocean-going submarine force. Now all work on surface ships was stopped, except on the battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* and the cruisers *Blücher* and *Prinz Eugen*, and transferred to submarines.

It was, however, fear of German air-power, rather than of Panzers and U-boats,

*Top left: Battle simulation in the Nuremberg stadium, 1938. Amid smoke effects, infantry and Panzer II tanks cavort for a capacity crowd. Top right: Refuelling Stuka dive-bombers, January 1939. The dreaded gull-winged Ju 87 was to win easy victories in Poland and France in the absence of adequate fighter opposition. Left: Battleship Bismarck, 1940. Her fifteen-inch guns, massive armour, and high power made her the pride of Hitler's navy and the strongest battleship of the day*





that kept the statesmen and peoples of Europe awake at night. Forbidden military aircraft were being built. Germany had become very air-minded. Flying and gliding clubs flourished. Aircraft factories were established abroad. The Reichswehr secretly trained military pilots in Russia and Italy. The state airline Lufthansa held men and operating resources that could be transferred to the Luftwaffe when it was formed. In December 1933, four months before its existence was announced, Göring had assembled 1,888 aircraft for it, 584 of them operational types.

By September 1939 the first-line strength of the Luftwaffe was between 4,000 and 4,700 aircraft: some 700 Me 109 fighters, 1,100 Ju 88 and He 111 day-bombers, 350 Ju 87 (Stuka) dive-bombers—all new and successful types—400 Me 110 two-seater fighters—an unsuccessful new type—and 550 transport aircraft. The remainder were army and naval co-operation aircraft and a few older fighters and bombers.

Despite the cold-blooded destruction of Guernica by the Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War, the Luftwaffe was not primarily an anti-city or strategic bombing force. It was planned for army support, and paid little attention to the development of a long-range heavy bomber, concentrating instead on medium day-bombers and dive-bombers. These latter, although very vulnerable to fighters, could be highly effective in support of the Panzers.

#### *Maginot Line and Maginot-mind*

Although for France, victory had in 1918 avenged the defeat of 1870, the nation's confidence in itself and in the army had been deeply eroded by the frightful years of the more recent war—the shattering miscalculations of 1914, the repeated failures in the offensives from 1915 to 1917, and, etched in memory, Verdun in 1916. A

**Left:** Life on the Maginot Line, the French fortification system built in the 1930's along the eastern frontier. The fortresses proved practically useless: Germany's fast-moving armour bypassed them in the 1940 invasion. **1** Troops in an underground gallery. They were quartered in air-conditioned compartments and typical forts had underground recreation areas and railways. **2** Food for the garrison. **3** Artillery casemate, gun, and crew. Soldier in foreground is fusing shells. **Right:** British weaponry. **1** British Vickers Mark 6 light tanks on manoeuvres October 1939. These obsolescent tanks operated in France and the desert in a scouting role. **2** Practice scramble. RAF pilots race for their Spitfires, May 1939. **3** Aircraft-carrier, HMS Ark Royal. Completed in 1938, she was sunk by a German submarine in 1941.







population of under forty million had lost 1,385,000 men killed, and large areas had been occupied or devastated. The price of victory was remembered with bitterness that turned to cynical despair when, after what France saw as the undue leniency of Versailles and the culpable failure to enforce reparations, Germany rearmed and threatened war.

In the years between the wars, the mass army was retained, but its effectiveness was sapped by financial stringency, by successive reductions in the length of military service, and by distrust of its usefulness to do anything but bring about another blood-bath. The doctrine of offensive *à outrance* was abandoned for one of slow, heavily prepared infantry advance, and the Maginot Line was built. The generals of 1918 stayed on, in the words of de Gaulle, 'growing old at their posts, wedded to errors that had once constituted their glory'.

Alsace and Lorraine, lost in 1870 and now returned, lay vulnerable to a German war of revenge. Along the Rhine the Alsatian frontier is easily defensible, but the Lorraine frontier, running westwards from the Rhine to the southernmost point of Belgium, is much less so. André Maginot, renowned for his gallant war record and subsequent work as minister of pensions, forced through financial provision for the line that bears his name, sited primarily to guard the Lorraine frontier, with an extension along the Rhine.

To the obvious criticism that the line did nothing to guard against a repetition of the German advance through Belgium of 1914, the French General Staff gave several answers. Germany was the potential enemy, not Belgium. The ground was low lying and unsuitable for Maginot-type fortifications and the Lille industrial complex too close to the frontier to be protected. In the north a field force would advance to the rescue of Belgium, while further south the Ardennes were impracticable to large armies. Much of this, though certainly not the last point, was sound enough, but the Maginot Line soon began to absorb far too much of the material resources and moral commitment of the nation, diverting them from the developing concept of mobile, armoured warfare.

The French generals, indeed, paid lip service to the tank, and, as war drew near, large numbers were provided for the army. But neither Pétain, nor Weygand, who followed him as the head of the army in 1931, nor Gamelin, who followed Weygand in 1935, would accept the idea of self-contained armoured divisions concentrated for breakthrough in depth. Infantry, they insisted, was the dominant arm. The tank should support it.

In September 1939, after mobilization, some sixty infantry divisions, two cavalry

divisions, two light armoured divisions (*divisions légères mécanisées*, DLM) and two heavier armoured brigades faced the Germans in north-eastern France. Nine infantry divisions faced the Italians in the south-east. There were, in addition, fortress units on both fronts and training units and new units forming in reserve. In the colonies there were about ten infantry divisions and some cavalry brigades. By May 1940 one more DLM would be formed and the armoured brigades would be expanded to armoured divisions (*divisions cuirassées*), while a third armoured brigade would be forming. This was, however, from a total of some 2,250 reasonably modern tanks, roughly equivalent to the German and Czech tanks, and 440 First World War Renault FTs, completely obsolete and out of place on a 1940 battlefield.

Gamelin, 67, aide to Joffre in 1914, imperturbable, colourless, complacent, held the supreme command, and his pale orthodoxy set the tone for lower commanders. 'We need tanks, of course,' he had written to Reynaud, '... but you cannot hope to achieve a real breakthrough with tanks. ... As to the air, it will not play the part you expect. ... It'll be a flash in the pan.'

The French navy was relatively more formidable than in 1914. As well as five reconstructed older battleships, there were seven modern 10,000-ton cruisers, ten slightly smaller ones, sixty flotilla leaders and destroyers, seventy submarines and an aircraft-carrier as well as two fine new 26,500-ton battle-cruisers, the *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*. Four 35,000-ton battleships and two aircraft-carriers were building or about to be laid down.

The air force, an independent service, had stagnated both in doctrine and material. The vital factors of aircraft performance and industrial capacity had been neglected and continued to be even after rearmament had started in the other services. In September 1939 the first-line strength of the French air force was some 600 fighters, 170 bombers and 360 reconnaissance aircraft. Of these 520 were modern fighters but outclassed by the Me 109; most of the remainder were obsolete. The warning system was rudimentary. By May 1940 improvements would have been made, but France would still be fatally weak in the air.

## Great Britain—weak on land

Great Britain, traditionally a sea power, was confirmed in her distrust of continental commitment by the experiences of her armies on the Western Front. There and elsewhere on land she had lost 700,000 dead. Yet in the First World War the Royal Navy had not come up to expectations. The stranglehold of blockade, though effective in the long run, had been far too slow

to rescue France and Russia, let alone Belgium, from invasion. German submarines had brought Great Britain close to defeat. Perhaps independent air-power, to which Lloyd George and Smuts had looked hopefully in 1917 when all attempts to break the German line in France seemed doomed to failure, might offer something better than the two older modes of warfare.

The vulnerability of Great Britain to sea blockade, however, continued to demand adequate naval strength, and imperial commitments seemed to require conventional land forces. Painting a lurid picture of cities under air attack, proponents of air-power raised ethical problems, and also, by making defence appear hopeless, strengthened the hands of the appeasers who would condone aggression at any price. Under these influences British strategic policy developed much as might be expected. In another war Great Britain would fight at sea and in the air, it was decided, rather than commit an army to the continent, but, until well into the 'thirties, most of the limited funds available for defence went to the two older services and was spent by them on traditional arms.

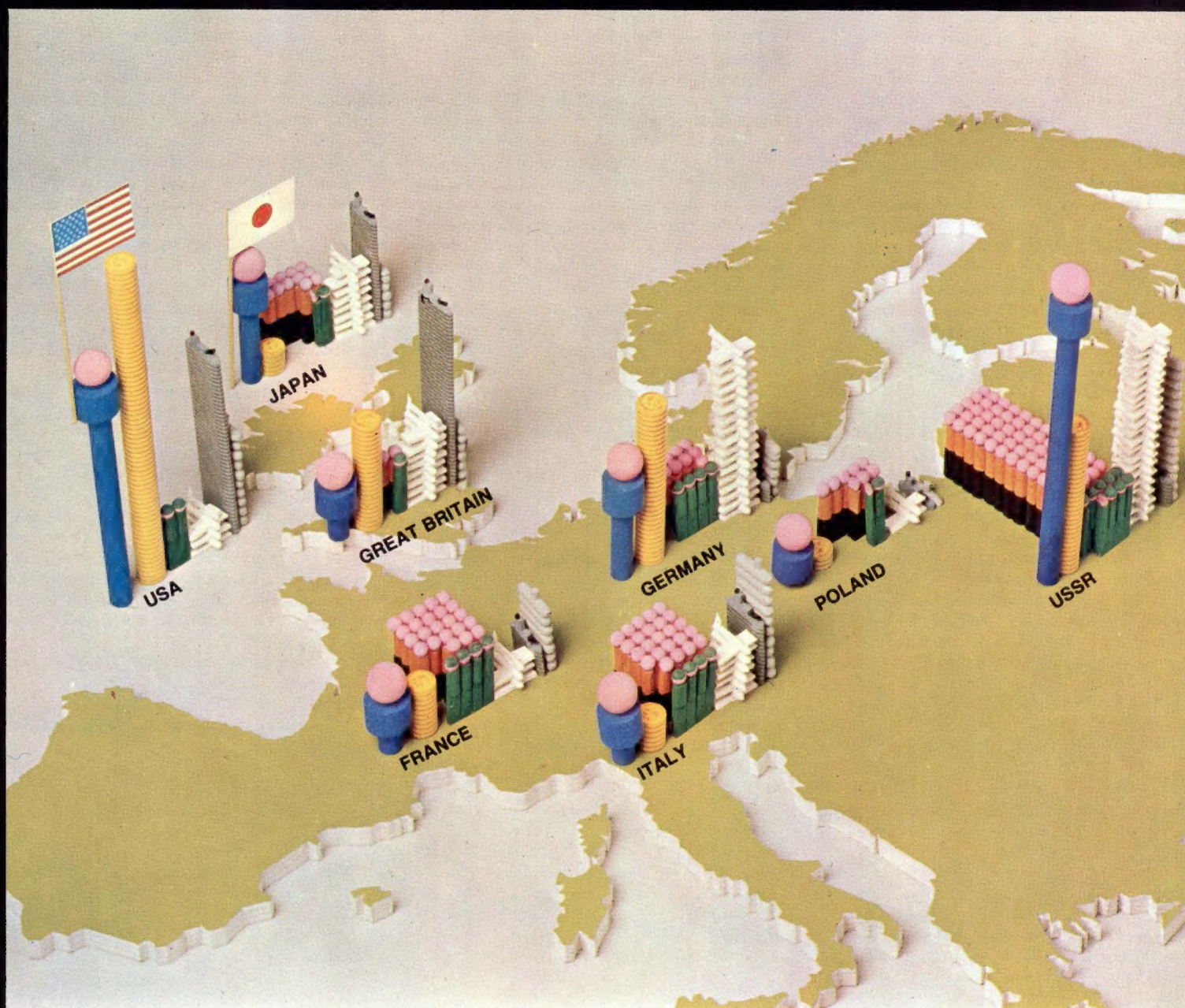
Great Britain had led the way with the tank in the First World War, and for a while continued to hold her lead in its post-war development. Liddell Hart and Fuller developed the concept of the armoured breakthrough, and their writings were avidly studied in Germany and Russia. An experimental mechanized force was set up rather half-heartedly in 1927, but a tide of reaction was setting in. The British Army, small in size, long-serviced, based on a fully-developed industry, was singularly well-adapted to the armoured concept, but Great Britain, having given birth to the idea, now turned away from it to the compromise of restricted armoured support for an infantry army and to nostalgic horse-warship. Tank design faltered, and production failed to get into its stride when rearmament began.

At almost the last moment, in the spring of 1939, Great Britain woke to the reality that France dared not face Germany without British assistance in the defence of her land frontier. In quick succession the doubling of the Territorial Army and the imposition of conscription were announced in a belated attempt to provide an army adequate to the need, but shortage of weapons and outmoded leadership went near to stultifying the effort.

Thus in the autumn of 1939 Great Britain was able to send to France only four regular infantry divisions with fifty cavalry light tanks. By May 1940 one more regular and five more divisions from the Territorial Army had arrived, and tank strength had grown to a two-battalion infantry tank brigade (100 tanks) and two cavalry light



# The Balance of Power, 1939



Relative strength of all major belligerents in Second World War. The number increased after the first blows: Italy entered in 1940 and Russia, Japan, and the USA the following year. Russia's apparent dominance was offset by the obsolescence of her land forces

	Great Britain	France	USSR	USA	Poland	Germany	Italy	Japan
Population (thousands)*	47,692	41,600	167,300	129,825	34,662	68,424	43,779	70,590
National income (\$m)*	23,550	10,296	31,410	67,600	3,189	33,347	6,895	5,700
Reserves (millions)	0.4	4.6	12.0†	**	1.5	2.2	4.8	2.4†
Peacetime armies (millions)	0.22	0.8	1.7†	0.19	0.29	0.8	0.8	0.32†
Aircraft (first line)	2,075	600	5,000†	800	390	4,500†	1,500††	1,980
Destroyers	184	28	28	181	4	17	60	113
Submarines	58	70	150	99	5	56	100	53

\*1938    \*\*not available    †approximate    ††1940



tank brigades (200 tanks). One—largely regular—armoured division was about to cross for final training in France. Three other Territorial Army divisions, for whom there were only rifles and no artillery, had spent the winter building airfields in France. The equivalent of one division had fought in Norway. Other divisions were arming and training in Great Britain.

In contrast the Royal Navy was a major world force. Under the Washington Treaty the navies of Great Britain, the USA, and Japan had been set at the ratio of 5:5:3 for battleships and aircraft-carriers. British battleships were on the whole rather older than those of the other two powers, and her carriers, like theirs, a mixed collection. Denounced by Japan, the Washington Treaty ended in 1935, and now nine new British battleships of 35,000 tons or over and six excellent new carriers were building or projected, as well as cruisers and smaller ships, but only the carrier *Ark Royal* had joined the fleet, which in September 1939 comprised: twelve battleships, three battle-cruisers, seven aircraft-carriers, sixty-four cruisers, 184 destroyers, and fifty-eight submarines.

Naval aviation remained a weakness owing mainly to the poor performance of carrier-borne aircraft. Reliance was placed on the gun against air attack and on the Asdic against submarines. In general, the navy was surface-ship minded, regarding

the air and submarines as ancillaries, but in spirit and confidence nothing was lacking.

When in July 1934 Mr Churchill had warned Parliament that Germany possessed a rapidly expanding secret air force, the Royal Air Force at home amounted to 488 first-line bombers and fighters in forty-two squadrons, with nine squadrons for naval and army co-operation, and twenty-four overseas. The programme then announced to raise forty-one new squadrons in five years soon gave way to new and more ambitious programmes, each overtaken by its successor before completion. As radio location (later Radar) was developed and the high-performance eight-gun fighter appeared, fighters began to get priority over bombers. The four-engine heavy strategic bombers under development would not be ready for several years.

By September 1939 first-line strength had reached a total of 2,075 aircraft, of which 415 were overseas and 1,660 at home, which included 530 bombers, 608 fighters and 516 reconnaissance and co-operation. 500 fighters were modern, Hurricanes and some Spitfires, but the bombers, intended for day-bombing, were highly vulnerable to fighters. An advance air striking force was to leave for France, so as to bring bombers closer to German industrial targets.

### *Poland—an easy victim*

Cut off from Great Britain and France on the eastern frontier of Germany, Poland after mobilization had an army of thirty-nine infantry divisions and eleven horsed cavalry brigades, but only one tank and two motorized brigades totalling together 225 modern and 88 obsolescent tanks in addition to armoured cars and reconnaissance vehicles. First-line air-strength, mostly obsolescent, amounted to 150 fighters, 120 reconnaissance bombers, 36 medium bombers and 84 army co-operation aircraft. In the navy there were four destroyers, five submarines, and some light craft. Including frontier defence the whole amounted to a peace strength of 370,000 with 2,800,000 in reserves.

Failing a land offensive in the West against Germany, for which as we have seen the French army was neither trained nor organized, or strategic air bombardment, for which at the time Great Britain was neither technically capable nor ethically prepared, help for Poland could only come from Russia. By signing the non-aggression pact with Germany on 23rd August 1939 Russia declared that no help would be given. For the present Poland was on her own against Hitler.

*Force of a vanished era: Polish cavalry, 1939. During the German invasion of Poland a cavalry unit charged Panzers*





## 1941

**Hess: parachutist extraordinary**

Shortly before 10 o'clock on the evening of 10th May 1941, a Messerschmitt 110 flew in over the Scottish coast near Berwick-on-Tweed. The pilot and sole occupant of the aircraft was Rudolph Hess, the Führer's 48-year-old deputy.

First reports of an enemy plane seen in the vicinity were not taken too seriously by defence units. A Messerschmitt, it was argued, flying so far from base would have insufficient fuel for the return journey. But this pilot was not playing the war game by the conventional rules. His plan was to bale out near the village of Eaglesham in Renfrewshire and allow his aircraft, the latest model and still on the secret list, to crash and burn itself out. Then he intended making his way to Dungavel House, home of the Duke of Hamilton, to commence negotiations for peace between Britain and Germany.

The early part of the project worked out roughly the way Hess had calculated. Though he mistimed his parachute jump and for a few moments lost consciousness as his plane dived towards the ground, he managed to break loose in time to avoid any injury worse than a sprained ankle. The first man to reach Hess was the ploughman on the farm over which the German had ditched his transport. Hess was escorted to a small whitewashed cottage to wait for the local military. Meanwhile he gave a false name—Alfred Horn—but made no secret of his intention to meet the Duke of Hamilton.

This peculiar ambition was inspired by Professor Haushofer, a German intellectual with a diplomatic background and a respectable Nazi record. Haushofer calculated that Germany could not survive a war on two fronts and, like most of the Nazi hierarchy he wanted a submissive acceptance by Britain of German hegemony in Europe and a free hand in the East. When Britain turned down Hitler's highhanded demands for a settlement, Haushofer persevered with his attempts to open a channel for negotiation.

Hess was converted to his views and enthusiastically supported attempts to arrange a meeting with, among others, the Duke of Hamilton 'who has access at all times to all important persons in London, even to Churchill and the King.' An unsent invitation to visit Lisbon for talks was intercepted by security staff before it reached Hamilton who, in any case, was reluctant to neglect his air force duties for the sake of power politics. Before British Intelligence could decide whether or not to follow up the German initiative, Hess made up his mind to take charge of the operation. His flight to Scotland was the result.

A few hours after his arrival Hess was taken to Buchanan Castle, outside Glasgow. He was depressed by his reception which was no better than that normally handed out to enemy captives. Even a visit from Hamilton failed to raise his spirits since the Duke was not easily persuaded that the prisoner was Hess and proceeded to demand proof of his identity. Eventually he was convinced

on that point and reported the news direct to Churchill. Subsequent interviews involving Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, who had been first secretary at the British embassy in Berlin before the war and knew all the Nazi leaders, established beyond any doubt that the prisoner was who he said he was.

Unfortunately for Hess, agreement on the question of identity did not seem to make his task any easier. He was gradually made aware that his colleagues at home were embarrassed by his mission. Hitler knew that the British could score a notable propaganda victory by advertising the defection of a high-ranking Nazi. To soften the impact of such a news story he allowed a communiqué to be released suggesting that Hess had met with a flying accident while suffering from 'a mental disorder' which made him the 'victim of hallucinations'.

As it happened, the British were also interested in showing that Hess was not altogether sane. The country was experiencing the most depressing period of the war and any hint that Germany was seriously prepared to consider a peace settlement in return for a free hand against Russia was liable to attract strong public approval and dilute the fighting spirit of the nation. For this reason Hess was surrounded by psychiatrists who attempted to diagnose his unusual behaviour in terms that were not in the least flattering to his intellect. 'Hess may have a megalomaniac-paranoid trend. His profound devotion to Hitler over so many years was semi-pathologic and he may have been suffering from homosexual panic when he ran away.' This assessment by an American psychiatrist, like so many others that received wide publicity, was based solely on the evidence of newspaper cuttings and photographs.

Hess was certainly a neurotic character and he provided the doctors with strong evidence of instability by seeming to have lost his memory. Ironically, he was only feigning amnesia in the hope of being repatriated. He played the same trick at Nuremberg when the prosecution, needing to prove his fitness to stand trial, toned down earlier medical verdicts and concluded 'he is not insane in the strict sense'.

Hess made no apology for his devotion to the Führer and was clearly guilty of 'Conspiracy and Crimes against Peace'. But his sentence—imprisonment for the rest of his life—was harsh even by Nuremberg standards. Today, Hess is the last of the Nazi leaders—indeed, the last prisoner—remaining in Berlin's Spandau prison.

Details from: Rudolph Hess, The Uninvited Envoy. James Leasor, Allen & Unwin, 1962.

**Top:** Wreckage of Hess's Messerschmitt which crashed shortly after Hess had parachuted to safety. **Centre:** The ploughman, first to reach Hess after he had landed, and his wife.

**Bottom left:** Hess, portrayed in heroic style. He had fallen into the background after 1939. **Bottom right:** The Duke of Hamilton, whom Hess had met briefly in 1936 at the Berlin Olympics.



Glasgow Herald



Glasgow Herald



Syndication International



## 1941

## Guide for liberators

'Manner of dealing with crimes by members of the (German) armed forces . . . against the (Russian) civilian population.

(1) There is no compulsion to prosecute actions committed by members of the armed forces against enemy civilians, even when such acts constitute crimes under military law.

(2) In judging such acts it should be kept in mind in each case that the collapse of 1918, the later times of suffering of the German people, and the fight against National Socialism, with the many National Socialists who perished, were mainly the result of Bolshevik influence, and no German must forget that.'

Hitler's directive of 13th May 1941

## Destruction of the Hood

'There they were, in deep sharp silhouette on the horizon—*Bismarck* and *Prince Eugen*, steaming in smokeless line ahead, unperturbed and sinister . . .

'At last it came—a signal flashed from *Hood*—"Open fire!" Almost immediately after there were the great orange flashes and huge clouds of black smoke belching from the forward turrets of the *Hood* as she fired her first salvo. . . .

'Now followed the most exciting moments that I am likely to experience—those desperate and precious seconds racing past while guns were reloaded and the enemy's first salvo was roaring to meet us. Suddenly one became conscious of that unmistakable noise, which produced a horrid sinking feeling inside one—a noise growing in a gradual crescendo—something like the approach of an underground train, getting louder and louder and filling the air, suddenly to cease as the first great spouts of water rose astern of *Hood*. . . .

'I ran to the other side of the ship, where, to my horror, I saw a great fire burning on the boat-deck of the *Hood*. . . as one looked . . . the incredible happened: there had been that rushing sound which had ominously ceased, and then, as I looked a great spouting explosion issued from the centre of the *Hood*, enormous reaching tongues of pale-red flame shot into the air, while dense clouds of whitish-yellow smoke burst upwards, gigantic pieces of brightly burning debris being hurled hundreds of feet in the air. . . *Hood* had been blown to pieces, and just before she was totally enveloped. . . I noticed that she was firing her last salvo.'

*Esmond Knight, Enemy in Sight, from Tales of the Fighting Navy from Blackwood, Blackwood*

## A Man's Solution

'There is a simple solution to the cigarette shortage problem. . . . Let women stop smoking. . . . If they gave up the habit their health would be better and tobacco would be available for those for whom Nature intended it. I refer to men.' *Letter in Daily Telegraph*



## The spy who was left in the cold

Richard Sorge had the ideal background for a professional spy. He was a brilliant linguist, an international journalist and a social charmer. From his Russian employers' point of view it also helped that he was a devoted Communist who somehow managed to keep clear of intra-party rivalries.

Sorge was born in Russia but lived with his family in Germany before the First World War. After a period organizing Communist cells in Europe he was adopted by the Fourth Bureau of the Red Army who trained him for a career in espionage. His first assignment was Shanghai but by the early 'thirties he had transferred to Tokyo where he established one of the most successful spy rings in modern history. Working—ostensibly—as Far Eastern correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* he had access to the German embassy in Tokyo and became a close friend of the ambassador who frequently sought his expert view on confidential matters. Of the numerous collaborators Sorge managed to recruit, the most valuable was an assistant to the secretary of the Japanese cabinet. Together they kept Moscow informed of almost every worthwhile detail of German and Japanese policy in the Far East.

War in Europe strengthened Sorge's reputation—at least with the Germans who appreciated his willingness to be used as an unpaid consultant. But the Russians had less faith in the abilities of their man in Tokyo. When, in 1941, Sorge warned Moscow of the German troop movements towards the Soviet frontier, Stalin refused to believe that an attack was imminent. Even when he provided the exact date of the invasion and details of the German divisions the information was not given the priority it deserved. Naturally, as soon as his forecast was proved to be correct Sorge was upgraded in the estimation of the Russian leaders and on his assurance that Japan did not intend to join in the attack, troops were moved from Siberia to help in the defence of Moscow.

At about this time Sorge realized that Japanese Intelligence were compiling a bulky file on his activities, and he was arrested on 15th October 1941. Throughout his trial he believed that the Russians would save him. Instead, Stalin disowned him and even after Sorge's execution in November 1944, the Russians refused to acknowledge that he was their agent.

But his achievements were not entirely forgotten. Twenty years after his death his country made amends by declaring Richard Sorge a Hero of the Soviet Union and designing a postage stamp in his honour.

**Top left:** Poster for 'Blood and Sand' (1941), which set the seal on Tyrone Power and Rita Hayworth as big stars—an updated version of the 1930's film with Valentino and Lila Lee. **Top right:** Sorge in Japanese garb. **Bottom:** 1941 song sheet—comment on cigarette shortage at home while soldiers had plenty

